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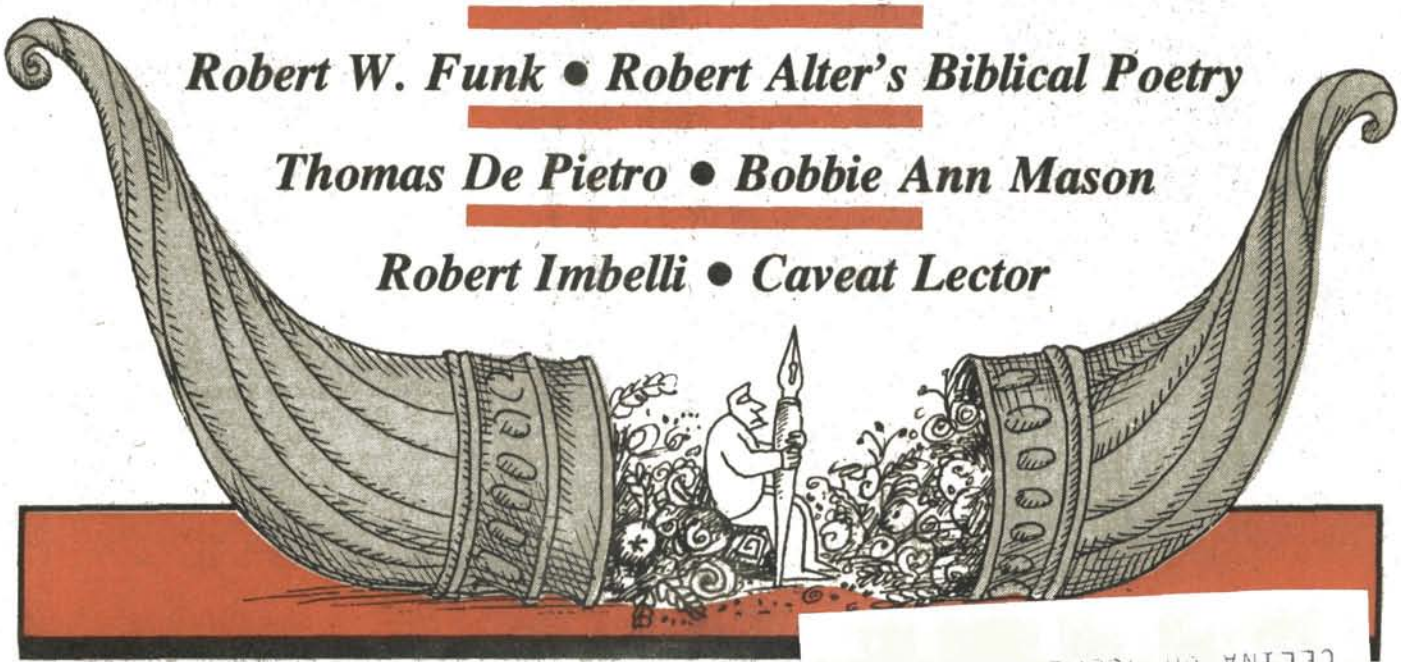

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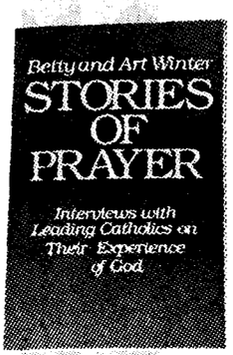

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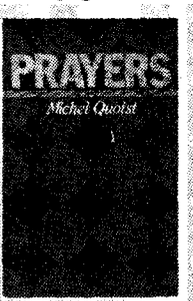

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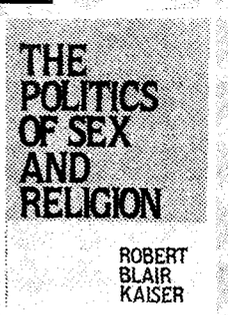

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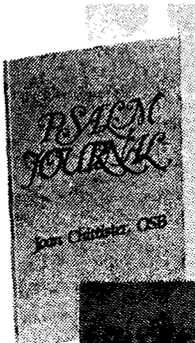

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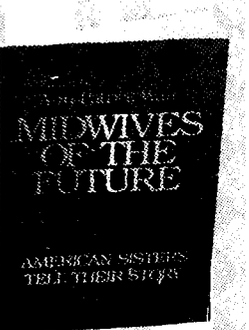

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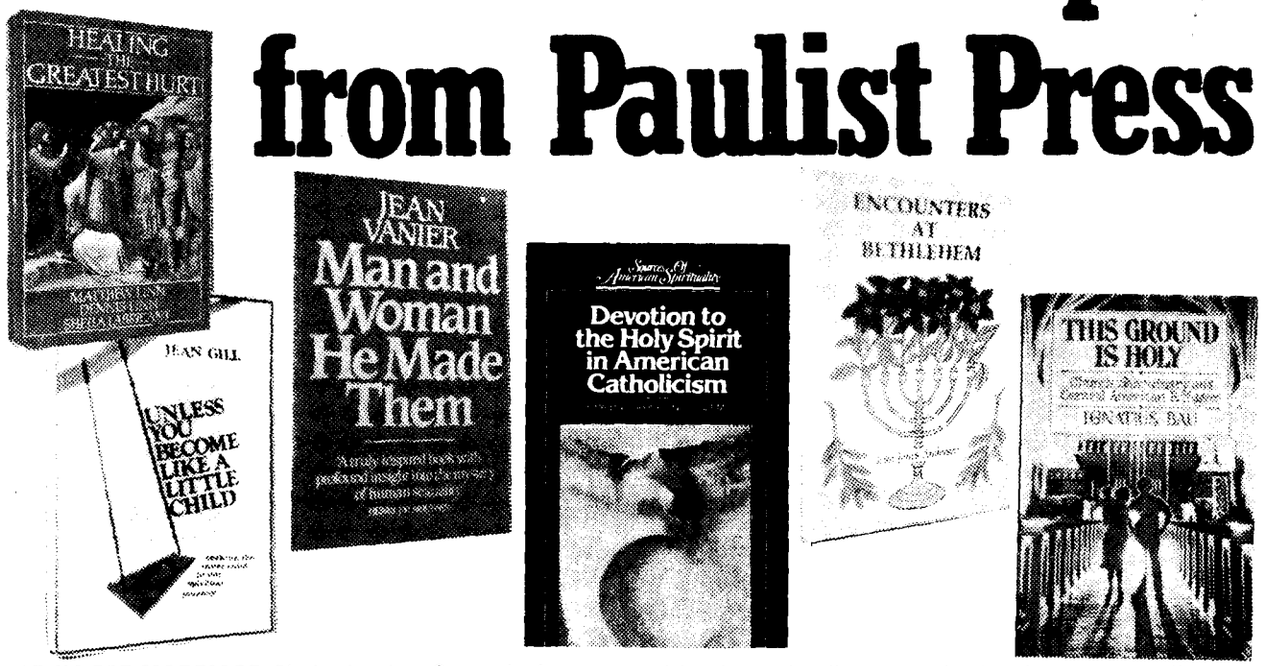
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Correspondence

Regretting & not

Bronx, N.Y.

To the Editors: Rabbi Mittleman and Judith Banki ["Jews & Catholics: Taking Stock," September 6] demand from the church too little historically and politically, and perhaps, too much theologically.

Jews ought not trust the institutional church until Rome owns up fully to Catholic complicity in, and cowardice toward, anti-Semitism. Vague regrets for past wrongs, unspecified, are not enough.

Concession is not confession. Those who do not admit their past are bound to repeat it.

Once we honestly confront our past sins, moreover, some present imperatives become clear. For instance, after vandals deface a town synagogue, the bishop should be on the scene expressing outrage and offering condolence. The Simon Wiesenthal Center has noted the absence of local episcopacy in such situations.

There is, more significantly, the matter of diplomatic recognition for Israel. Forget lip service to Israel's permanence. Let Rome put its nuncio where its mouth is.

Such tangible commitments, and not doctrinal fudging, will anchor religious tolerance in the Catholic tradition. Banki and Mittleman cannot reasonably complain that Catholics are called "to witness to Christ as the redeemer of all . . ."

This is what we believe, believe full-time, even if those we've wronged are within earshot. It makes us Catholics. Because of this belief, and not despite it, we Catholics feel shame for twenty centuries of injustice. KEVIN M. DOYLE

No final word

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: As one who welcomed the appearance of the Holy See's recent "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism," while realizing their limitations, I would like to respond, at least in part, to the thoughtful article on the "Notes" by my good friends Judith Banki and Alan Mittleman. I believe they have done an excellent job of pointing out the areas in the "Notes" which have occasioned quite legitimate concern in the Jewish community. More, they do this within the spirit of the dialogue itself. This is important since the "Notes" themselves call for just such further dialogue with Jews and further reflection within the Catholic community on the issues (e.g. the Holocaust, the State of Israel, and the theology of the relationship) that they themselves raise.

So while I am more positive in interpreting the "Notes," I am by no means satisfied that they are the final word on the subject — nor, I suspect, is the Holy See's Commission. What they are is another step in the process begun by Vatican II. Hence, I do not look on the "Notes" as "schizoid," but rather as, first, a consolidation of progress already made and, second, a call to further efforts by Catholic educators. The surprising thing, in this view, for example, is not that the State of Israel is given "short shrift," but that it is mentioned, not only positively, but as an essential reality or sign of the times that needs to be taken into account in Catholic catechesis as such. Again, while the document does present the Exodus as "an experience of salvation and liberation that is not complete in itself," it says much the same thing of the church, which "yet awaits its definitive perfecting as the Body of Christ" in the eschaton. What Catholics need to contemplate, in the wake of the "Notes," is how *rabbinic* Judaism may be said to be itself a "fulfillment" of biblical Judaism, and how the Jewish witness to the world — including its attachment to the Land and its differing but "comparable hope" in the Messiah — can be assisted by the church.

DR. EUGENE J. FISHER

The hidden persuasion

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: The Vatican equivocation on the Jews set forth in the recent document "Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism," should really not cause undue surprise, much less alarm, among Jews. We have frequently made such mistakes in interpreting the intention of the nations, most lamentably in our optimistic reading of the promises of the Emancipation and latterly in our self-persuasion that we could find security by the dissimulations of national assimilation. History pulls us up short and we are obliged to retract what amounts to eschatological dreaming (our wish to believe that the nations learn and reform themselves) to the more predictable ambivalences that are implicit in such massive structures of power as the church.

I have argued unpleasantly in *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* (Harper & Row, 1970) that there is a fundamental and ineffaceable Jewish-Christian enmity that arises out of the historic refusal of the Jewish People to cave in to the promises of Christian salvation. As Jews we read history more uncertainly, having already learned from several destructions that God's salvations are not wrought as promised, that God delays, that God's being and effects remain a mystery. Christians had to learn this from the beginning as a new *factum* of their theological life: Jesus did not return after his death, and the church is constructed for the duration of "the between-times." Given the fact that God did not accommodate the nascent community of Christian faithful by turning the hearts of the Jews or returning the Messiah in glory, it could not be otherwise than that the church would place upon the Jews its own disappointment. And yet, from my perspective, I would wish (no, hope is more precise) that

(Continued on page 623)

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Illustrations: Cover and pp. 600 & 602, Paul Valerry, Frankfurt; p. 609, Cork; pp. 601 & 607, Religious News Service photographs.

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly, except monthly Christmas-New Year's and June, July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 232 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016. Telephone: (212) MU 3-2042. Single copy, $1.25. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $24; Canada, $26; foreign, $29. Special two-year rate: U.S., $43; Canada, $47; foreign, $53. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Commonweal*, 232 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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TO ADMIT DIVERSITY & ENDORSE DISCUSSION

LIKE THE DOG that didn't bark, two highly significant recent events didn't take place. One was the keynote address that Governor Mario Cuomo of New York was to deliver on justice and the tax system at the October 25-30 convention of the National Conference of Catholic Charities. The other was an ad scheduled to run in an early October issue of the *New York Times* reproducing the "Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion" which had appeared in the *Times* a year before and expressing, in addition, "solidarity with all Catholics whose right to free speech is under attack" — most notably, the sisters threatened with dismissal from their religious orders by Rome if they did not retract their endorsement.

Both of these non-occurring events raise serious questions about the ground rules for dissent, dialogue, and pluralism in the American Catholic world on the matter of abortion. Answers will not come easily, especially given the intensity of convictions found on all sides of the abortion debate. But failure to reach some degree of clarity about these grounds will trap the American church — laity no less than bishops — in a spider's web of inconsistencies and recriminations harmful to the church, to its concern for justice, indeed, to its resistance to abortion.

Funny things happened on the way to the non-appearances of both Cuomo and the "solidarity" ad. Very different things, as well, because the two incidents raise different, although related, questions.

The invitation to New York's governor provoked a sharp protest from the Pennsylvania association of bishops. Was it that particular attack from an anti-abortion source, or other ones which could easily be foreseen, that persuaded the governor to withdraw from his speaking engagement on grounds of possible conflicts with the schedule of the New York state legislature? We don't know, but there is little doubt that the official reason was a fig leaf. Certainly the tone of the letter from the Pennsylvania bishops indicated how little charity Mr. Cuomo could expect at the Catholic Charities convention.

To begin with, the bishops charged that "no other politician has so elaborately rationalized opposition to the bishops' efforts to correct our nation's abortion policies." What does that mean exactly? As the Pennsylvania bishops chosen phrase implicitly admits, Governor Cuomo's decision not to support the U.S. bishops' effort to replace *Roe* v. *Wade* with a ban on abortion does not distinguish him from many other political figures, Catholics included. What does distinguish him is that he has offered a reasoned defense of his chosen course — voluntarily, on a Catholic campus, and given unqualified assent to the church's teaching on human life at the same time as he questioned the wisdom and workability of the pro-life legislative strategy. That was his special sin. For the Pennsylvania bishops, to explain one's prudential judgment openly is to *rationalize*; to do so in detail, and perhaps even convincingly, is to *elaborately* rationalize.

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The best was yet to come, however. The Pennsylvania bishops compared the Catholic Charities invitation to Cuomo to an NAACP invitation to "a racist," a shockingly false analogy. A more accurate comparison would be with an NAACP invitation to a politician who shared its anti-racist philosophy but differed on how to put it into effect (and, incidentally, the NAACP does extend invitations to such politicians). A still more accurate analogy — one not raising the substantial differences between a group like the NAACP and a church organization — would be the invitations Catholic bodies have often extended to a wide variety of political leaders despite their differences with episcopal positions on nuclear weaponry, aid to the impoverished, Central America, and other life-and-death issues. In replying to the Pennsylvania protest, Msgr. J. Jerome Boxleitner, president of the National Conference of Catholic Charities, expressed regret that Cuomo would not be speaking because, among other reasons, "we lose an opportunity to discern a major issue in the Catholic church today, namely, the right of a person to address us even though we may not entirely agree with the presenter's views in all areas."

On the issue of the politically most prudential anti-abortion

GENERAL DELAY

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

"Boy," said President Reagan, "I saw Rambo *last night and next time I'll know what to do."*
New York Times

"GOOD AFTERNOON, gentlemen. I've called this meeting with the National Security Council and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to discuss possible responses to the hostage crisis. I'd like to bounce my ideas off you. You see, I saw *Hamlet* last night and this time I think I know what to do. I'm thinking of doing nothing for a while . . . sort of to *think* about it for a bit. Kind of delay action until I have a chance to mull over all the possibilties. If I may be so bold as to ask, what do you think?"

"Mr. President, in my opinion, we've been delaying long enough. And I think that's the opinion of the American people. That's why we've devised several contingency plans for you to examine. We've put together options involving the Seventh Fleet, the Green Berets, the Marine Helicopter Unit, and, as a last resort, the Nuclear Threat. Which would you like to hear first?"

"Oh, I don't know, let me think about it."

"Mr. President, if you don't mind my disagreeing with you, sir, I think you've over-emphasized the importance of delay in *Hamlet*. Of course the hero has to delay killing Claudius. Otherwise the play would be a one-act revenge tragedy — and Olivier never would have filmed it!"

"I don't see it that way, General Mills. Delay seems central to Hamlet's character because he's a man of introspection, reflection, interiority. He's a hero who introduces himself with a pun — 'A little more than kin and less than kind' — which expresses his sense of the multiplicity of meanings and the disparity between appearances and reality, if one can speak of *reality* in a world as problematical as Hamlet's."

"Mr. President, that's a highly modern, existential interpretation. Nothing in the play refutes the essential fact that Claudius murdered the king."

"Well, General Electric, it's certainly true that that simple fact is never in doubt. But how one should respond to a simple fact — that's the elusive, complex problem."

"Mr. President, I also saw a Shakespeare play last night and it might offer us some wisdom. What, I ask myself, would Othello do in this situation? And I say to myself, 'Self, he would zap the bastards! Throw everything he has at them!' In the words of the immortal bard. 'Once in doubt is once to be resolved.' "

"Yes, General Dynamics, Othello does say that, in Act II, scene iii, if I remember correctly. It's a crucial line because it expresses those qualities of character which precipitate the tragic catastrophe. Othello sees things too simply, in terms of good and evil, which suits him well on the battlefield but not in the realm of human relations. No, I much prefer the tragic wisdom of the melancholy Dane."

"You know, Mr. President, I think you might well be right. I happen to have seen *King Lear* last night and learned that there are a lot of ways to win and lose. Lear begins 'every inch a king' in the superficial sense, reveling in the panorama and procession of the court, relishing the power of monarchy. Ultimately he defines himself as nothing more than 'a foolish fond old man,' imploring Cordelia for forgiveness."

"Exactly! You know, I saw Barrymore play Lear in 1939. He was monumental — the more so because his Lear was so utterly humbled."

"Although the extent of Lear's tragic wisdom is certainly debatable."

"Of course it is, General Tire. That's why people continue to read and study and discuss Shakespeare. That's exactly what we're here for."

"Will *King Lear* be on the final exam, sir?"

"No, General Food. I think we'll save *Lear* for the term paper. A dandy subject for a seminar paper would be *King Lear*'s Military Options."

ROBERT H. BELL

(Robert H. Bell teaches English at Williams College, and airs his humor on National Public Radio.)

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strategy, we believe Governor Cuomo is more right than wrong. That doesn't mean his position is sacrosanct, or devoid of political calculation, or should be immune to political pressure — from right-to-lifers as much as from NOW, from the Catholic community as much as from other religious or ethnic groups. But bishops, as they themselves insist, must find a way to bring moral principles to political life without becoming simply another lobby or, worse yet, attempting to mobilize the church as a lobby — an effort that is almost certainly doomed to failure. There are legitimate questions that Pennsylvania's bishops, or any other group, could press on Mario Cuomo. After all, he has been far less reluctant than other politicians to respond to them. But the bishops demanded more than such give-and-take. They wanted Cuomo proscribed.

Is any Catholic politician who disagrees with the bishops on abortion strategy to be publicly delegitimated? To have one's religious sincerity questioned? To be compared with a racist? That is the first question raised by the Cuomo incident. But a further question lurks just behind it. Will the U.S. bishops as a whole, whose feelings about abortion are no doubt as firm as those of their Pennsylvania contingent, be held hostage by any vocal group among them — or among the laity, for that matter — which raises the pro-life banner? Or will the bishops stick to the principle they overwhelmingly approved in their pastoral on nuclear arms and many other statements, namely, respect for a diversity of opinions among Catholics and other people of good will in making specific prudential applications of moral principles? Only Governor Cuomo's discreet withdrawal removed this question from the table. It *will* have to be faced.

If the objection from the Pennsylvania bishops was not exactly unexpected, that could not really be said of the funny things that happened on the way to the non-appearance of the *New York Times* ad. One was a stinging editorial in the September 27 *National Catholic Reporter* titled "Don't Sign the Abortion Ad." The other was a memo issuing from the New Orleans meeting of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious suggesting, though not so bluntly, pretty much the same thing. Controversy over the *NCR* editorial is sure to continue, partly because it was so strong (calling the ad "deceitful, dishonest, and divisive"); partly because it charged that news of the latest ad shot down a potential settlement between the Vatican and the nun-signers of the first ad (given the secrecy of those negotiations, this will certainly be hard to substantiate); and partly because the *NCR* has been a place where Catholic mavericks and critics of ecclesiastical authoritarianism have usually found sympathetic coverage. Perhaps some form of the ad will appear; nonetheless, these two independent negative judgments on it have had an effect.

Without prejudging the *NCR* controversy, we can still second one of its editorial's key conclusions: that the new ad, like the old one, exemplifies "once again taking the abortion issue from the level of serious religious commitment and theological discussion to that of a mere political sign-up campaign." The original ad was a model of calculated ambiguity, mixing, as Governor Cuomo scrupulously does not, the moral and legal dimensions of the abortion issue; giving parallel play to the diversity of Catholic opinion on abortion revealed by public opinion polls and the differences among theological scholars; amalgamating debates over exceptional "hard cases" with the national debate over *Roe* v. *Wade*. The new ad tops this confusion with an even heavier dose of concern for Catholics' "right to free speech," a phrase which covers everything from serious questions of academic freedom to much fuzzier issues of canceled lectures. (Was Mr. Cuomo's "right to free speech" violated by the Pennsylvania bishops' protest? Was Jerry Falwell's when several colleges canceled speaking engagements after he called Bishop Tutu a "phony"?)

To use the original ad's phrase, "respectful discussion" on the diversity of Catholic opinions over abortion is a good idea. But such respectful discussion won't be carried on in catchphrases and newspaper ads, which do nothing, furthermore, to relieve the situation of the sisters faced with the Vatican's blanket *diktat*. Ecumenical dialogue began when religious groups *stopped* resorting to such devices, when they learned to make elementary distinctions, and when they agreed not to use discussion as camouflage for proselytization. The ad promoters should learn as much.

Of several minds: *David R. Carlin, Jr.*

HEGEL & PORNOGRAPHY

THE LIMITS OF PERSONAL TASTE

ONE OF MY great rules in life is that if neither Hegel nor Alexander Pope had anything to say about it, then the thing (whatever it may be) is probably not worth talking about.

Given this rule, "The Rape of the Lock," suitably construed, might, I suppose, provide a justification for discussing the split currently opening up in the feminist community in the United States over the explosive issue of women, pornography, and the law. But my masculine intuition tells me I'd better stick with the ponderous German on this one.

Give any historical movement enough time to evolve the implications of its underlying idea, says Hegel, and that idea will reveal inner contradictions, splitting the movement into two or more mutually hostile sections. The feminist battle against pornography, I suspect, may be bringing the American women's movement to such a Hegelian parting of the ways.

Time was, in the heyday of the sexual revolution (that is, before herpes, AIDS, and Ronald Reagan), when pornography was good clean fun (or at all events, good

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dirty fun), a lighthearted badge of liberation and advanced thought. Those who opposed it were bluenoses, religious fanatics, and/or crypto-fascists bent on laying mines under the First Amendment. Many feminists, it was true, in their capacity as private individuals, found themselves revolted by pornography. But they recognized that reaction for what it was: at best, a matter of personal taste; at worst, an unfortunate residuum from a pre-liberation upbringing.

But in recent years the women's movement has had sober second thoughts about pornography, concluding that women's disgust with it may signify not so much an archaic prejudice as an up-to-date insight. Pornography, however, is not wrong for the puritanical reasons that used to be given, e.g., that it stimulates "prurient" or "impure" interests. It is wrong instead, we are told, because it objectifies and dehumanizes women, representing them as mere sex objects, demeaned, humiliated, and even brutalized. Worse still, it portrays them as collaborating in their own sexual degradation, as though abasement were their secret heart's desire.

Great stress is laid on the distinction between pornography and erotica. The latter, say the propounders of the distinction, is O.K., because it serves to arouse and explore a variety of legitimate sexual interests, compatible with social equality between the sexes. But pornography is wicked because it is both a sign and an instrument of the social subordination of women to men, a kind of unholy sacrament. In other words, egalitarian dirty pictures are just fine, but patriarchal dirty pictures have to go. Erotica, si! Pornography, no!

In Minneapolis last year the city council passed an anti-pornography ordinance, drafted by lawyer Catherine A. MacKinnon and largely inspired by the work of Andrea Dworkin, whose book, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, has done much to bring about the new feminist attitude on the subject. Departing from the customary approach, which makes obscenity (a sloppy legal category, says the feminist analysis, since it embraces both pornography and erotica) a criminal offense, the Minneapolis act makes pornography a cause for civil action by a wide range of offended private parties — including virtually any woman who chooses to take offense at a particular representation.

The Minneapolis act, though eventually — and wisely — vetoed by the mayor on the grounds that it was a constitutionally impermissible infringement on free expression, was hailed by many feminists, and has led to the introduction of further anti-pornography legislation elsewhere in the nation. Though the Minneapolis measure was a piece of legal extremism, tamer and constitutionally more defensible anti-pornography acts will no doubt emerge in the months to come.

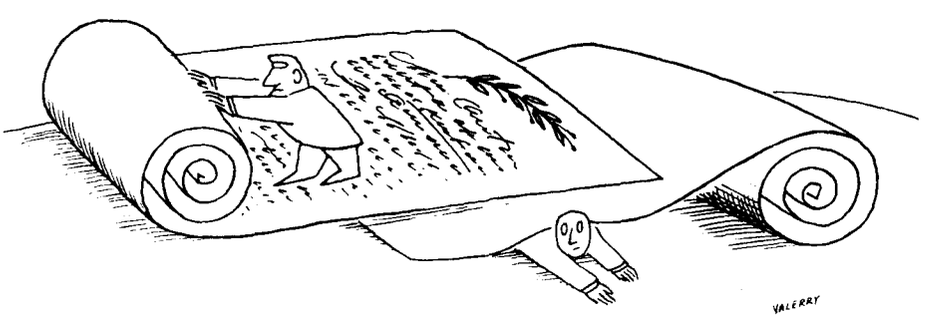
But another sector of the feminist community is up in arms against this sort of thing, denouncing it as contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the First Amendment. While not carrying a brief for pornography as such, they argue that in practice — especially in legal practice — it is often difficult to draw a line of distinction between pornography and erotica. Pass such laws, they argue, and the laws will be used to repress erotica, which will lead in turn to a repression of female sexuality, which in its turn will reinforce the social subordination of women. In other words, an anti-pornography crusade will produce precisely the result the crusaders wish to eradicate.

This anti-pornography earthquake reveals a hitherto concealed San Andreas Fault separating two very different kinds of philosophical foundations which underlie American feminism. On the one hand, feminists have been highly libertarian and individualistic. They have vigorously rejected the idea that women must abide by rules (other than rules necessary for public order) or remain in statuses to which they don't freely give consent. Hence they have insisted on the rights of abortion, of easy divorce, of entering sexual relationships as they see fit, etc. This theory's bottom line is that there exists, and by right ought to exist, a sphere of absolute individual privacy, where what I choose to do is nobody's business but my own.

On the other hand, no one, not even the most dialectically minded Marxist, has outdone feminists in insisting that everything in the social world is connected with everything else. Thus your true feminist, snuffing male chauvinism on every tainted breeze, can trace the smallest movements (the wrong gender-specific noun or pronoun, the little girl's doll, the little boy's gun, etc.) back to the vast machinery of oppression — so vast that it's difficult to see up close. The bottom line of this theory is that there is no sexist action or expression that qualifies as essentially private and therefore not guilty.

Obviously you can't have it both ways (though in fact, and in defiance of good logic, feminists *have* had it both ways until now, preaching radical individualism and total connectedness at the same time). Either there is a sphere of absolute privacy — and then my tastes in pornography, no matter how demeaning to women, are nobody's business but my own; or there is no such sphere — and then the law, in an attempt to protect the dignity and good name of one half the human race, has, at least in principle, the right to interfere with trade in pornography.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.



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'GODPARENTS TO A GENERATION'

What Frank & Maisie did in America

WILFRID SHEED

THEY were very hard parents to explain. To take just one thing: whenever they were in England, Frank Sheed and Maisie Ward trudged off every single Sunday afternoon — my father moaning to beat the band and praying for rain — to preach the Faith from soapboxes; and not just in glamour spots like Hyde Park, but in backwaters like Clapham and Pimlico and other places that properly belong in English comic monologues.

At first, the only thing that really struck me as strange was the sound of a man praying for rain in England; then again perhaps he was the cause of it all, and was doing a bang-up job. What does one know at five? Only slowly did I begin to realize that other people thought my parents were a little crazy. Soapbox oratory is by definition crazy. And when I attended my first meetings, I saw little to shake the definition.

A group of city strays would gather in front of a rickety platform and hurl tipsy taunts or village-atheist challenges at my parents who would answer with a gravity worthy of a lecture hall. My first thought was that they were going to get killed up there by some loudmouthed bully, and to this day I myself suffer from incurable stage fright. But on the way home, they might well complain about the blandness of the meeting: "If only a good drunk had come along," my father would sigh — surely as strange a wish as for rain on Sunday.

In truth, my parents were very far from being fanatics with that telltale gleam in their eyes. My father always believed that he would not have been a religious man at all if he hadn't found himself a Catholic. Of my mother, I am not so sure. She would certainly have been a causist of some sort and probably an orator as well, because she was so good at it and because, unlike Frank, she burned to speak out. But her mind was down-to-earth, in a high-minded sort of way, and I'm not sure she would have gone looking for a religion if she hadn't been drenched in one from baptism on.

Anyway, as I slopped around at the edge of the crowd in my gum boots and little school cap, I cared little about what got them up there. All I knew was that no amount of respectability in other sectors could make up for this one eccentricity; we were gypsies, oddities. "My parents are publishers," I would emphasize. But their Catholic publishing seemed almost as bizarre as their Catholic tub-thumping in the starchy secularity of England. So I resigned myself to the delicate pleasures of outsideness at an early age.

The publishing seems to have been the special idea of Josephine Ward, Maisie's mother, to begin with; at any rate, she backed it enthusiastically and staked the new house to 2,000 pounds — a sum slightly harder to translate into modern currency than the Roman denarius. The original Ward of Sheed and Ward was to be Maisie's brother, Leo, but he veered off in his own direction, leaving Maisie to step rather vaguely onto the masthead. Publishing, as those who know can tell you, is even more amorphous than starting a magazine or opening a restaurant, those other late-night brainstorms. A publisher simply puts up a soapbox of sorts and hopes that interesting performers will turn up.

Sheed and Ward had a little more on its mind than that. The Modernist crisis in the church had blown over for the time being, leaving the reformers in shambles. But World War I had rather shaken faith in the March of Thought as well. The doctrine of progress had been methodically blown apart in the trenches, while on the various home fronts, civilization seemed to be plunging into an era of unprecedented silliness and ugliness. Such famous postwar converts as Chesterton and Ronald Knox valued the church for its sheer steadiness.

The Catholic literary revival set out at first to be just that, a revival, and not a new departure. The immediate agenda was to ransack the church for treasures: to rediscover Aquinas with Jacques Maritain, to collate Christian mysticism and the Oriental variety with E.I. Watkin, to place the church in the history of culture and culture in the foreground of history with

WILFRID SHEED *was* Commonweal*'s drama critic and book editor, 1964-66. Two of his eight novels were National Book Award nominees. The above article is excerpted from his new book,* Frank & Maisie *(Copywright © 1985, by Wilfrid Sheed, reprinted with permission of the publisher, Simon and Schuster, New York, N.Y.)*

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Christopher Dawson. It was like looting the Vatican itself. This was the world that young Sheed and Ward confronted in 1927.

IN AMERICA, beginning in 1933, Frank and Maisie did more or less what they did in England: publishing books, they called it. It was years before I got any further than that phrase in describing their work to my set.

There was nothing about skyscrapers or Hollywood to prepare anyone for the Catholic church in America. And since I consider this institution to be Frank and Maisie's most peculiar challenge, and its conquest their most aesthetically satisfying, not to say lasting achievement, I'd like to circle it for a moment, in the temporary guise of a middle-aged buzzard, to point out some of the oddities.

America's many freedoms have not always and everywhere included the freedom to think. For Catholics before Vatican II, the land of the free was preeminently the land of Sister Says — except, of course, for Sister, for whom it was the land of Father Says. For "Frank Sheed says" to wedge itself into this prim hierarchy would require a more sinuous effort even than getting the English to pay attention.

Nevertheless, the English years made the attempt possible; I honestly doubt whether a native American could have done it right then. To begin with, the English view of the clergy was rather more relaxed. Evelyn Waugh, putting it most starkly, claimed that it was the duty of the educated classes to keep the clergy in its place. Or to hear it from a less antic voice: "Authority is intolerable but indispensable," said my grandfather Wilfrid Ward. On those terms the stuff could be accepted and even embraced gingerly.

"Rome says" was tolerable to English Catholics, because *somebody* had to say: the alternative being chaos or the insipidity of Anglicanism. But "Sister" barely existed to them as an intellectual concept, capable of saying anything, and "Father" was primarily a liaison figure with the Mind of the Church, as good or bad at it as his talent allowed him to be. If some lower clergyman began talking rot, one simply looked for another one. At least for company; any damn fool could dispense the sacraments.

There was, its being England, an element of class in all this which expressed itself strongly to a child in atmospherics. When a priest came calling in America, it was a very big deal. The best of everything was trotted out for him, although he usually didn't look as if he strictly needed it, and he was deferred to in everything: not only ecclesiastical matters, but in all things short of sports, where a layman was encouraged to have his own opinions. Households varied in their degrees of pliancy, but very few Americans ever told a priest that he didn't know beans about politics or constitutional law, or, as Frank remarked after a sermon on marriage, "I was edified, Father, that you seemed to know so little about it."

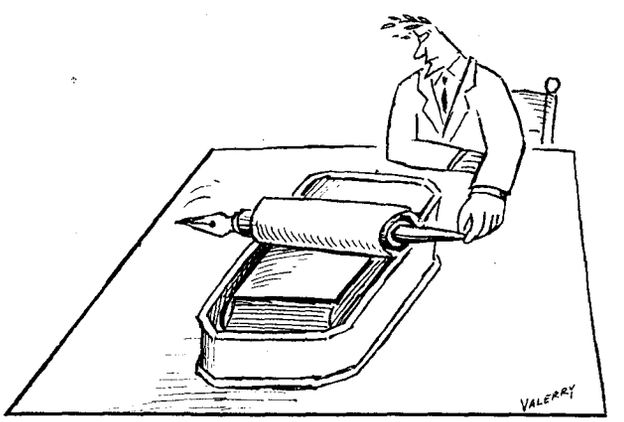
In America, the people in black were the teachers. One assimilated that fact very early in the quixotic parochial school system and continued to accept their authority — the alternative would be chaos and Unitarianism.

Frank Sheed hit the United States with a very useful collection of attitudes about all this: Irish enough to reverence the clergy as such — and Irish-Australian enough to be cynical about them; and now English (and monarchical) enough to respect the office totally and take the man as he found him. Having swallowed the royal family, he had no real difficulty with the American clergy. His running mental reservation about them is preserved in a story he used to tell about one bishop kissing another one's ring. "Oh, you needn't do that," dimples the younger of the two. "It's not you I'm kissing," growls the veteran, "it's your bloody office."

With this firmly in mind, Frank could cope with Father Says like a matador. The Catholic school system had provided him all at once with a thousand lecture platforms, and this is where his campaign began. For although the country was crisscrossed by lecturers offering as many routines as vaudeville, no one had ever used the platform quite like Frank: that is, to be a lay-preacher, to play the clergy at its own game under its own nose. Because, whether in drafty gymnasiums with the chairs scraped hastily over the basketball court or in overblown, over-endowed arenas, the clerical nose was always there; the people in black patrolled the world of talk like Secret Service men. So Frank's footwork had to be impeccable.

Outwardly the platform Sheed was a model of almost Oriental deference to "the bloody office." He had one particular silky-smooth trick that I never wearied of. Toward the end of a fairly rigorous theological lecture, he would somehow manage to suggest complicity with the fuddled Monsignor, or whatever he found next to him on the platform, as if they'd practically written the speech together. "Of course you've heard all this many times before from Father McGillicuddy," Frank would tell the audience. "But sometimes it takes a fresh voice to make people listen." Father McGillicuddy would then do his best to look intelligent. The beauty part of the trick (and Frank played a hundred variations on it) was that the priest was now effectively silenced. His wisdom had been established by this clever foreign fellow: one word from him would blow the whole thing.

These are dangerous games, and it would be too much to suppose that Frank always won them. Some priests resented him. The wilder of them might even challenge him in the early days. But all that Evidence Guild work on soapboxes had made



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the unexpected manageable, and even the dull endurable, for there were many other evenings when nothing happened at all, with the chair-priest dozing fitfully while the foreign smarty-pants talked himself out.

Thus, piling up enemies, aphasiacs, and woolly admirers, as well as some young followers who would change the face of American Catholicism, Frank lectured his stormy way from coast to coast across the Catholic ghetto, incidentally playing John the Baptist to his own publishing house. Because he could have published all the books he wanted and nobody would have come, he, and later Maisie, had to go out and create an audience, a mailing list — and some American authors, too.

Except for certain political presses, few publishing ventures can ever have been so closely tied to a lecture platform. Americans might not like to read but they certainly liked to listen. Since the English *hated* to listen (let alone pay to listen: in that gabby country, it was like paying for water), Sheed and Ward, London, had relatively little to do with lecture platforms. In fact by an irony almost too pretty to contemplate, the very same lectures that bought Frank a publishing house in America, complete with readers and working capital, could still be had for nothing at Hyde Park corner by any bystander with nothing better to do. A full-dress affair at Notre Dame or a rainy night at Fulham were all the same to our speaker.

Thus the theology that was to revolutionize the American church turns out to be just the old street-corner stuff hammered out and refined off the skulls of random hecklers. Frank always attributed his galvanic technique, indoors and out, to those bystanders who decided they *had* something better to do than listen to him, such as buying a sticky bun or taking in a flick or feeding the pigeons. Chastened by hundreds of backs receding over the years, sharpened to a fine edge by loneliness (he once recited the alphabet solemnly to an empty square, only to find a man standing in back of him), and kept forever on his toes by Protestant Alliance rowdies who literally tried to tie his shoelaces to the platform, he had developed the urgency of a man on a burning deck.

Eugene McCarthy, himself a spellbinder of sorts, once told me that he had learned much of his style from listening to Frank back at school. Back at school, everybody listened to Frank. I have yet to meet a Catholic over what? — thirty-five? — who didn't catch Frank, or Frank and Maisie, at least once. It's a record, I think, even among preaching priests, and an incalculable influence: godparents to a generation and more, sly strangers who sneaked past the school's puzzled infrastructure, its banana-republic officialdom, to talk to them, as you talk to a bloke on the corner. After the rococo of official sermons, and the false bonhomie of "Father Joe talks straight from the shoulder," these street-smart aristocrats had to sound good whatever they said. If they had done nothing else, Frank and Maisie would have helped change the whole style of Catholic intellectual discourse — which was an absolutely necessary first step.

Because style was the Defense Department of Sister and Father Says. Official theology was made to sound so dry and

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abstract that you wouldn't want to mess with it: only a few highly dedicated men had been chosen by Almighty God to think about it at all. (Sister had simply been chosen to pass it along.) Thinking itself was not only dangerous but dull, a cute double-bind so that if by chance you found yourself enjoying thought, you were almost certainly doing it wrong and heading for the tar pits. Only those hard, dusty years in the seminary, under proper supervision, qualified you to deal with the mysteries.

And once you had them, you just sat on them; above all you kept them out of sermons, which were strictly for uplift — which also sounded dull. So loud, dull sermons came to seem part of the strategy, distancing the laity from even its own thoughts. Many native strains of anti-intellectualism helped to nourish this Catholic aberration. Yet it was not official, it wasn't written anywhere. So if Frank and Maisie chose to challenge it, they could not be rebuked or silenced, only frowned at mightily.

Still such an orientation can put up quite a struggle, and Sheed/Ward would probably have wound up in the limbo of the smarties, if they/it hadn't abided by certain principles: (1) To challenge *anything* in the church, one must be personally devout. If the audience decides to plunk itself down for fifteen decades of the rosary and a couple of litanies between listens, you'd better plunk along with it (though Frank was known to peer dreamily through his fingers). (2) One must not make fun of other people's devotions, however asinine; Frank's private religious order, "The Little Dumb Sisters of the Ass of Bethlehem," only went public when the field was won. But anyway, his mother's peasant Catholicism had rubbed off on him; if that wasn't right, none of it was right. (3) Next, one must have all the markings of a demagogue, but manifestly not be one; in fact, I believe this requirement made Frank even more orthodox than nature intended (later critics who faulted him for this had no idea what it takes to start a revolution). (4) One must not tackle authority head-on, but, where possible, proceed as if it wasn't there. And finally, (5) one must (and this is a counsel of perfection) be foreign.

Because if Americans in those days loved to listen, they dearly loved to listen to foreigners, and foreigners were still rare and strange enough to get away with murder, whether as psychoanalysts or English mystics or as just plain lecture bums. And this, I believe, was Frank and Maisie's decisive edge over native Catholic pioneers, such as *Commonweal* magazine which was considered wildly subversive for printing the same kind of stuff, and sometimes even the same authors, as Sheed and Ward. Foreigners had credentials as such, and the papist Sheeds slipped in on the same visas as the Reichians and the Ouspenskyites.

Maisie all unconsciously played the foreign card even better than Frank (she couldn't play a card consciously without giving it away). Being more English, and much more blunt, she was also more definite about the role of the clergy in the life of the mind. In basic Catholic teaching, a working distinction is made between the spheres of intellect and will, and if you had to dump one of them off the sinking ship, intellect would have to go — but not in an argument it wouldn't. In that one limited field, intellect is king. And if you've got a better one than the other fellow, it doesn't matter a fig (as Maisie would say) whether you've been ordained or not. In fact, you should use your advantage like Billy-O (another of hers). So Maisie would light in merrily, to the alarm of the white collars, who had enough trouble with her tactful husband without having to fend off this ladylike dynamo.

Maisie was, in this one respect at least, a better model for Catholic feminists than even the great Dorothy Day. Because Dorothy was always likely to yield ground to church authorities, if only in a jiujitsu (or feminine) manner, while Maisie yielded nothing except what the church or reason absolutely insisted on.

The rock-ribbed confidence of her Edwardian generation seemed at once comical and awesome to Americans. The word "faith" had a resonance for English Catholics of her era, like a summons in the Old Bailey, racketing down corridors of time, and that was quite enough sword and shield for anyone. The church couldn't be threatened by an argument, so one argued with abandon. "Absolute bosh," she would say to the Lord's anointed or anyone else. And since she always talked to the subject — the opponent being merely an incident tossed up by a tedious fate — she couldn't be accused of personalizing issues in the female tradition.

Nevertheless, her being a woman sometimes did help her victims to escape. "Your wife certainly is a remarkable woman." Yessir, a real hellion. Maisie could be more outspoken than Frank partly because it meant less. There was a license for fiery women in those days: they could attack politicians and businessmen and such to their faces in ways their husbands were better advised not to. "Isn't she something? Wow!"

It was all very exasperating for Maisie, who was cursed, in the quaint language of the day, with a masculine mind trapped in a female temperament, so that she would literally sob with vexation after a particularly dense set-to. All she wanted was a fair fight, while all Frank wanted was to avoid one, fair or otherwise. But Maisie's life was strewn with *nolo-contenderes:* it was safer to admire her than to run the risk of "Father says" being routed by a woman. Her passionate conviction at times made it seem almost bad taste to oppose her. "Do you really mean that," she once said to me, "or are you just arguing?" By her standards, I seldom meant anything at all.

Curiously enough, the fiery female convention was finally to prove a great ally for both of them. To put the matter backward, Frank and Maisie both believed stubbornly that American women were brighter than American men. This biological improbability was, I believe, invented and promoted by them at least partly as a token of gratitude. Because, if one had to boil the Sheed/Ward American mission down to one sentence, it would be that Frank and Maisie finally gave Catholics permission to think without benefit of clergy. And in this respect, impertinent women already had a significant headstart. Since intellect as such was not considered of first

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importance for lay-people, women easily became the brains of a Catholic family, if it made the little dears happier, and easier to live and sleep with. I remember not once but often being driven to lectures by bland, inarticulate men whose wives had arranged the lectures, *and* study groups, *and* paraphernalia. And then later, aflame with the parable of Martha and Mary, the wives would sit at the Master's feet asking questions against a background of silent husbands.

American clericalism had completely neutralized the men; not only couldn't they talk religion, they couldn't talk anything that you'd want to bring into the living room. "Listen to how soon the word 'dollar' comes up at the next table," Frank said to me once, and the answer that day was approximately thirty seconds. But at home, in the soft religious glow, they couldn't even say "dollar," but sat mute and indulgent as Frank shone. It was almost as if he had decided to play with the girls at the feminine sport of thinking — a thought that bothered me more than once as a little fellow.

So, who knows, perhaps Frank by example did as much in the long run for Catholic males as Maisie for females. But during those years when the cat had the men's tongues, women, I'm convinced, made Sheed and Ward. They had rushed into the vacuum between Catholic ears, and the "Sister who says," like a recorded announcement, was the first to be upgraded to something serious. Sheed and Ward published a record number of books by nuns, and they were a far cry from the pious guff of yore. Some were asexually literary, others might be about life in the convent, opening those dusty windows for inspection and giving away the cabala-like secret that nuns were human. If the end of this line was to be short skirts, Sheed and Ward must shoulder an ounce or two of the blame: revolutions have a way of getting out of hand, and the Catholic Revival eventually drifted away from its founders' dreams, and in far more serious matters than skirt lengths.

But one shouldn't confuse eras. Sheed and Ward's first American authors were still predominantly priests and nuns, in the old order. To look on the darker side a moment: the church did not quake and roll over right away in the face of thinking lay people, but continued on its jolly way toward one of its more arrogant phases, the postwar boom. By that time, Sheed and Ward had begun to look awfully assimilated, somewhere on the edges of the Universal Church; it serviced the incurably brainy and kept them orthodox.

In this, its role was almost like the meliorism of the New Deal: Sheed and Ward led its public exactly as far out of the Dark Ages as the powers that be felt it was safe to go. Frank, too, began to seem like an institution. All those bishops he had tactfully wooed bore fruit in a body, and he knew a depressing number of them personally. His writings became textbooks, which is the surest method of embalmment ever devised. And worst of all, he remained alone on those platforms: no other lay preachers sprang up around him. He was an anomaly, there would never be another Frank Sheed, so his very eccentricity could be savored. He had sown no apparent seed in the new

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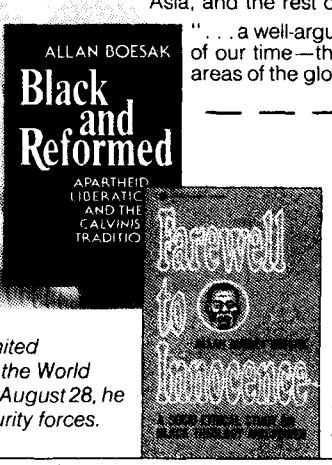

Allan Boesak is a founder of the United Democratic Front and president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. On August 28, he was arrested by South African security forces.

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land that the landscape couldn't handle. Or so it seemed in the fat fifties.

FRANK and Maisie were also an institution, but in some subtle sense, Maisie by herself wasn't quite. She was a wild card. After a time, one knew what to expect of Frank. But as late as the 1970s, nobody could have charted Maisie's next move. Her lectures were not strictly theological (which is why I have treated Frank's mission separately) but literary, historical, social — and whatever she had just discovered.

When I talk of the American church as dead from the neck up, I am not doing justice to the whole cadaver. There was plenty of social action brewing in the thirties, as clergy and laity, together at last, strove to fashion a specifically Catholic response to the Depression, and this Maisie was alive to at once. Here was where the talent was, and more important to her, the vitality of the American church. The soup kitchens and generally beat-up quarters where the Catholic Workers and others talked all night were a long way from the cushiony settings and faces of the lecture circuit. And Maisie (she of the wrong tennis dress) was wonderfully at home in shabby, *serious* surroundings; at least, they eased the Ward conscience for a while.

So although she continued to play all the instruments in her one-man band, Social Justice became Maisie's apostolate. While the Trotskyites and Stalinists were having it out across town, Maisie was visiting Dorothy Day's place on Mott Street, and later Chrystie, "a slum within a slum," and Day's farms, erratically manned by bums, and everyplace else one could find where the Gospel was down on its knees scrubbing the floors.

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It didn't occur to young Maisie to move left politically with the rest of the crowd: Christianity was quite enough for her, if anyone ever tried it. And if this seems naive she might have asked the heckler to compare Dorothy Day's apolitical efforts for the poor with the Communist party's in the thirties, forties, or any other time. The Communist superstition (later to surface as the "burn, baby, burn" fallacy), that you had to let things hit bottom before you could rebuild society, drove Maisie simply wild. Dilettantism in the face of suffering was more than she could bear. "Pie in the sky when you die" was bad enough when attributed to Christians. From Social Realists it was — her most withering condemnation — "sheer humbug." In her view, if you didn't do it this afternoon, you surely wouldn't do it ten years from now. If she walked into an office and found nobody working, she wouldn't linger to hear about its manifesto. Maisie even battled Dorothy Day about this when she found that the Catholic Worker farms were not producing. How condescending, how pointless.

Frank also visited the Catholic Worker frequently, and even if it was mainly to talk theology, he still had his old Marxist interest in the social issues. In 1936 he wrote what I consider to be his best book, *Communism and Man,* the first half of which was later used in Communist study circles and the whole of which was praised, in an anonymous review, by George Orwell. Frank's response to the Depression was typically cerebral, but he knew very well what he was responding to; after the dialectic had been wrestled to the floor, *Communism and Man* rounds on the church as Maisie might have, demanding from it social action at least as throughgoing as Communism, and much more compassionate. Short of that, it didn't matter how theoretically superior the church might be: the search for justice would simply bypass it, or trample it down.

The anticlericalism of the Spanish Civil War was just bursting into flame, and as so often, I wish Frank had been just a little bit less abstract: I never knew a man to read newspapers so thoroughly — and use them so little. To write a book about Communism during the thirties, and leave out the thirties was, I think, a mistaken discipline. Owing to some private sense of fitness, of what belongs in a book — a book by him at least (he couldn't have used slang under torture) — he severely rationed the facts in his writing and stuck with abstraction. And granted that few people ever made the abstract so real as Frank, it remained abstract, the Catholic curse. Catholics then and even now did not need this. They could already start talking "just war" theory before they knew precisely where the relevant countries were.

Where Frank's gift for hard detail did show was in his publishing. He knew his books inside out and could, if he had had the time, have done all the copy-editing himself, whatever the subject. Even on lecture tours, Frank and Maisie never stopped publishing. They read incessantly, having to make judgments in a strange, uncongenial language. I once told him

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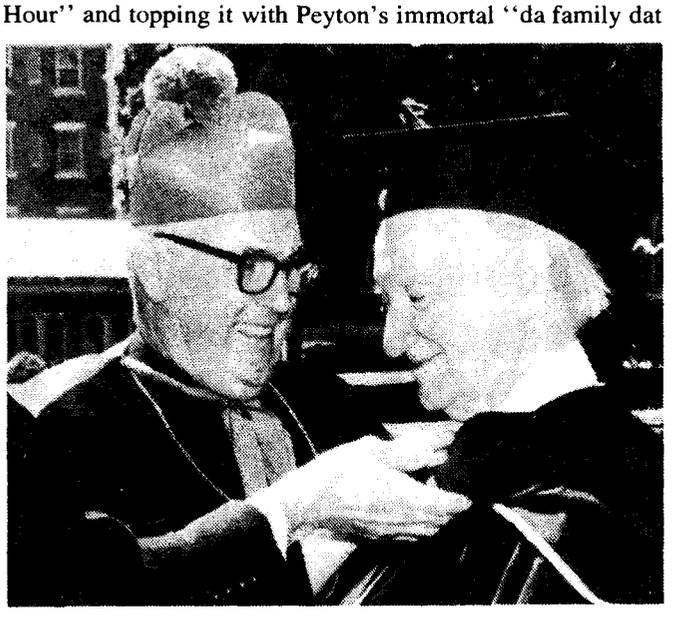
that one of his nuns' books called *Play It Cool, Sister,* was just too arch for American ears, but he loved it. Perhaps he was right. He picked some pretty good American writers over the years.

"I'd rather lead an orchestra than play the flute," said Frank, in modest reference to his own writing. But he meant it. The most mischievous phrase a publisher, or anyone, can use is "Have you ever thought of writing a book?" and Frank used it scandalously often. He was not content to bring European writing to America and dust his hands of the matter; he was going to take something back with him if he had to wring it personally out of every bright housewife, shy nun, and glib Jesuit he met. The punishment for himself and Maisie was excruciating. Even on the most frantic of lecture tours, the pair of them would be found wading or darting through piles of half-baked efforts, eternal judges at an amateur open house.

He made it a rule, quite indispensable in this case, to add up the pluses and forget the minuses. Obviously, he was not going to get a great literature out of these tattered, sometimes brain-damaged parochial-school veterans and numbed survivors of college theology; but what he did get gradually was a ragbag of witnesses, as the American church began to swap experiences and know itself. Americans uniquely still had to be introduced to each other, while Europeans knew each other all too well. So in this respect at least, the New York operation was quite different from the English one, although I'm not sure that Frank and Maisie, who tended to be country-blind, quite saw it this way. At least, their London people often seemed perplexed by Frank and Maisie's American enthusiasms, and published them with little hope of success.

But the enthusiasms were right for America, and by the forties and fifties, Sheed and Ward had helped at least to shade in the outlines of a counter-Catholicism to which a civilized person could repair. Since this period coincided with the last gaudy parade of the Church of Cuteness — with Spellman and Sheen blown up like Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloons, and Jimmy Durante saying the rosary on the "Father Peyton Hour" and topping it with Peyton's immortal "da family dat prays togedda, stays togedda" — it was handy to have such a bomb shelter, which could later be used as an attack station.



The schools and colleges and seminaries kept getting bigger and bigger in those days, and this included the libraries, regardless of whether there was anything to put in them or not. Since among new titles only Catholic books need apply, Frank and Maisie had merely to recommend one and then back up the truck. The only trouble in paradise was that they had to cope with the unworldly stinginess of the clergy, who wherever feasible demanded a "clerical discount" of bloodsucking proportions ("The vow of poverty means you never have to pay" — FS); but large orders mean large printings and students do eventually graduate and a precious few of them, at least, continue to read. Sheed and Ward began in a small way to flourish, almost to pay for itself, and Frank got to keep some of his lecture winnings.

But this was a long way away in the 1930s, when the *Queen Mary* was still racing the *Normandie* across the Atlantic, and H.G. Wells and Queen Marie of Rumania were interminably disembarking. Observers of that period always remember Sheed and Ward's foreign authors first. "Chesterton . . . Eric Gill . . . Léon Bloy . . . Maritain . . . Paul Claudel . . . Christopher Dawson . . . Romano Guardini . . . We'd never *heard* of such people." So although several young American authors were cheeping and hopping around the barn in the thirties, they didn't come into their kingdom until World War II closed off the Atlantic and forced America to grow its own authors. And while waiting for these to fatten, Frank could always busy himself with a series called "A Masterpiece a Month to Form a Catholic Mind" or with Walter P. Farrell's majestic *Companion to the Summa*, or his own translation of Saint Augustine.

Or he could caper. He had all the license he needed thanks to the notion that Catholics have more fun than other people, a notion stemming largely from Belloc and Chesterton but quickly accepted (among Catholics at least) as virtually an act of faith. I don't suppose the theological world had ever undergone a *funny* publishing house before. By religious standards, Sheed and Ward's house organ was quite unprecedented in its breeziness. "You become what you read, so be careful" was its motto. Later it mutated into something called Sheed and Ward's *Own Trumpet* ("You must stir it and stump it/and blow your own trumpet/or, trust me, you haven't a chance" — Ruddigore) which, from its pictures and headlines, might have been promoting a line of joke books.

Frank occasionally published secular books to amuse himself, but Sheed and Ward couldn't match the sales forces of the secular big boys, and besides you could hardly lay siege to Brentano's with one general-interest title on your list.

Thus, as if any help were needed, circumstances made Frank and Maisie even more Catholic than they were. And it made our home life about as Catholic as you can get outside a religious community. Except for one taciturn, brick-faced Presbyterian cousin whom my father dragged round one day, I cannot remember a single non-Catholic that I ever met through my parents. Thank God it's an interesting religion.

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Screen

ART OF THE ACTRESS

HEROINES & VICTIMS

A COMMON complaint about films in recent years has been the lack of good roles for women. This fall makes up for that. Whatever their defects as movies, *Agnes of God* and *Plenty* at least provide showcases for actresses to carry on in the way that actors have done in their portrayals of mad visionaries or neurotic rebels. Even stronger portrayals are found in a group of better late-summer and early-fall releases that include some of the finest performances by actresses this year.

The best is unquestionably Vanessa Redgrave as a Yorkshire schoolteacher in *Wetherby*, a film written and directed by David Hare, who also wrote *Plenty*. *Wetherby*'s plot is simple: Redgrave gives a dinner party, and, the day after, a young man who attended shows up on her doorstep and explains that no one had invited him. He just "showed up" — some guests (Judi Dench and Ian Holm) assumed that he had been invited by the host, and Redgrave assumed they had brought him along. As he tells the story, we relive scenes of the party, especially Redgrave's slightly astonished look when she had opened her door and her polite, witty welcome of her unexpected guest ("The more, the merrier"). Then, suddenly, comes the shock: when the young man finishes his tale, he blows his head off.

Wetherby becomes a why-he-dun-it, with an exploration of the lives of the hostess and guests and the detective who investigates them. Several time frames are simultaneously examined: the dinner, the shooting, the immediate past, and the 1950s. Part of the intrigue involves figuring out how all the pieces fit — a kind of psychological *Clue*. Of particular interest is an incident from the deep past: Redgrave remembers her first love affair. Playing Redgrave as a young girl, Joely Richardson (daughter of Redgrave and director Tony Richardson) is both a perfect look-alike and fine performer in her own right.

Wetherby's suspense lasts because of the superb ensemble acting, a setting where Redgrave's skills shine brighter than when she dominates a cast (witness *The Bostonians*). One gesture— when she reaches to touch a friend (Judi Dench) the morning after the suicide — has more genuine humanity in it than all her Sarah Bernhardt imitations. As a teacher, she is convincingly tender-tart with students. Indeed, she's at her best when she loses an argument with one of them over the value of education.

Hare is willing to ask questions in *Wetherby* in consistently ambiguous and dramatic terms. Although the plot peters out, and the answer to why-he-dun-it is too pat, the middle of the film is valuable for its reflections on civilized behavior, the masks such behavior imposes, and the difficulty of living with the masks. In *Wetherby*, unlike *Plenty*, Hare settles for no easy answers. He is also blessed with an actress who, unlike Meryl Streep, goes beyond her usual range, and the standard theatrical rant, to provide us with genuinely personal acting.

DANCE WITH A STRANGER is another British import with a potential Oscar-winning role, the portrait of the last woman ever to be executed in England (in 1955). Written by Shelagh Delancy, the film is sad, depressing, and finally moving — though not necessarily because its heroine ever becomes fully attractive. Ruth Ellis (Miranda Richardson) was a high-class call girl, then a nightclub singer, and finally a lover of two different men: one a rich young playboy (Rupert Everett), who leads her on with false promises, and one a responsible, though dowdy businessman (Ian Holm). In the abstract, she confronts the dilemma of so many romance-heroines: one man is sexy but not nice, the other nice but not sexy.

What makes this interesting is the cinematography and Richardson's high-pitched performance. Appropriately, most scenes occur at night, but the *noir*-ish feeling is intensified by the frequent use of dimly lit clubs, elevators, stairways, and halls. Although filmed in color, few hues brighten its drab world, mostly a rainbow of blacker shades of gray. Richardson, however, is a platinum blonde exclamation point; a Marilyn Monroe look-alike, she wears the resemblance like a seal of doom, and when she dons showy red dresses really marks herself off. These powerful visual associations are intensified by Richardson's way with one-liners and her remarkable shrieking tantrums. (When Everett dishonestly suggests they "must get married," she shoots back, "Why, are you pregnant?") Like Jessica Lange several years ago in *Frances*, Richardson doesn't seem to be *acting* mad; her weird bawling seems the genuine article, and wins sympathy for her in the process. Although *Dance with a Stranger* doesn't whitewash her character, Richardson manages to evoke for Ruth Ellis a bit of Conrad's pity for "the horror, the horror."

MY OTHER HUSBAND is a French farce starring the oddly named Miou-Miou (*Entre Nous*) as a woman who tries to manage two households. It is not, as some claim, a Gallic version of *The Captain's Paradise* — the fifties English comedy with Alec Guinness as a bigamist happily voyaging between Gibraltar and Spain and two equally deceived spouses. Miou-Miou happens into her ménage quite accidentally — and, at the end, eighties style, even tries to engineer a happy solution. Moreover, she genuinely loves both men (one an Air France captain to whom she is legally married; the other a teacher) and their children. One of the charms of this movie is that the background is only fully explained about two-thirds of the way through, just when Miou-Miou's double life starts coming unraveled. About the only fault of the plot is her too-good-to-be-true luck at the close.

What particularly distinguishes this film from most other

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French farces is the fresh and affectionate eye it turns on domestic details. The children are charmingly mischievous without seeming too cute. Both fathers are strongly individualized and never caricatured. The Air France captain genially reprimands his son for taking too seriously the social studies taught at his excellent Jesuit prep school, particularly the socialist teachings of one "Father Lenino." The other father plays weird but amusing betting games with his four-year-old daughter. *My Other Husband* is a celebratory look at the family; there just happen to be *two* families, oddly coupled. Holding both together is the sweetness and intelligence of the central performer: her acting miracle is in making us believe in supermère.

Marie stars Sissy Spacek at her usual, reliable, gritty best. She plays Marie Ragghianti, a real Tennessee woman who blew the whistle on some high-level corruption in the early 1970s as the chairman of the State Parole Board. Mrs. Ragghianti discovered that Governor Roy Blanton was selling pardons for campaign contributions; she alerted the FBI despite sure risk to her career and even some risk to her life. With Spacek as its central force, *Marie* is a moving, sometimes frightening depiction of one woman against the world.

Unfortunately, *Marie*'s story is not always well told. The director is Roger Donaldson, a New Zealander who made *Smash Palace*, and who has been hired by Hollywood (in specific, MGM) to produce artful American melodramas (like Australian Peter Weir at Paramount). Artfulness, in *Marie*, however, comes out as trying to tell too much while using shock editing techniques to cover the mess. Some of the best scenes in *Marie* involve her family, and it is impressive to see her abandon a brutal husband and raise three children (one with a serious health problem) while she tries to pursue a career and fight the bad guys. But so much is included that the central drama becomes confusing; often we simply do not know who the key secondary characters are in the Parole Board scandal. In addition, Donaldson forces transitions between family and public life with "arty" visual associations; the worst is a cut between the end of a funeral and the opening of a court session.

Despite Donaldson's sloppiness, Spacek unifies the film by catching and holding onto Marie Ragghianti's determined personality. Spacek doesn't play characters with serious flaws; although she is right too often, she never seems righteous. Perhaps her size helps, or a kind of all-American simplicity and straightforwardness that prevent her from seeming *too* moral. Helping her out is Jeff Daniels who plays the governor's legal counsel with the kind of smiling, insincere slickness that he has mastered in several roles (*Terms of Endearment, The Purple Rose of Cairo*). Fred Thompson, Marie Ragghianti's original lawyer, plays himself in the gripping courtroom finale.

There are other current films with heroines deserving of further comment: *Eleni, Sweet Dreams, Jagged Edge*, and *Je Vous Salue Marie*. Of the four I have reviewed here, there is no common denominator in the presentation of women's dilemmas. Two present different kinds of victims, two different sorts of heroines. They reveal nothing like the trend in televi-

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sion to address contemporary concerns of the "new" woman — as in shows like *Kate and Allie*, or the serious, excellent detective series *Cagney and Lacey*, with its teamwork between a single policewoman and a married one (who, this fall, both in real life and in the series, is pregnant). These films are more concerned with history than with the present. Nevertheless, each addresses specific problems of womanhood or motherhood in provocative ways. And in each, the lead actress makes us excuse the film's limits.

TOM O'BRIEN

Stage

UPBEAT, DOWNBEAT

ICEMAN & THE ROPE-DANCERS

IT IS ALMOST thirty years since the revival of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* at the old downtown Circle in the Square, a production that confirmed the importance of that theater and established the reputations of Jason Robards and Jose Quintero. Now the actor and the director are back with a new and even more impressive *Iceman*. Robards's Hickey has lost some of the frenetic quality that he had in 1956 (that is what thirty years will do), but the actor has retained many of the character's salesman-preacher mannerisms and paced them more slowly. There is now a kind of gravity to Hickey's false playfulness that increases the sense of the salesman as malevolent savior. Robards's performance is the stronger for being at the center of a production in which there is uniform excellence in the casting, not simply in the other leads (Barnard Hughes, Donald Moffat), but in all the contributive smaller roles. This is particularly noticeable in the long first act, before Hickey takes the stage, when the play sprawls in its not really aimless aimlessness, introducing the audience to each of the regulars at Harry Hope's, establishing the atmosphere of the place and the play, and setting out the theme with the repetitive deliberateness that anti-O'Neill critics deplore. I am not one of them. I am willing to sink into the play, knowing that a production as good as this one will demonstrate that O'Neill is only apparently saying the same thing over and over. He is actually piling line on line, crushing the playgoer with the emotional weight of the work and what it has to say about the need for illusions, and at the same time letting the audience see the intricacy of that deceptively ungainly monument sitting on each one's chest.

Iceman runs for nearly five hours. That I hardly noticed may be an indication not only of the quality of the play and the production, but of my taste in theater. I like a well-peopled stage, which may be why I grew restless at both *Song & Dance* and *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, although I admire the artistry of both Bernadette Peters and Lily Tomlin. I found myself thinking of Madame Saqui, the celebrated nineteenth-century rope-dancer described by Robert Storey in his admirable *Pierrots on the Stage of Desire*; she performed mimodramas on the high wire, playing all the characters.

The rope on which Lily Tomlin performs is more substantial than the one on which Bernadette Peters manages her precarious footing. "I would like for it to be considered a play," says Jane Wagner, the author of *The Search (New York Times*, October 4). It is not a gathering of self-contained sketches, as Tomlin's previous shows have been; so call it a play. Tomlin is still presenting a wide variety of characters, establishing them quickly with changing voices and mannerisms (and the amusing help of Otts Munderloh, the sound designer), but now the characters cross one another's paths, are joined, thematically rather than dramatically, through the repetition of images, even of jokes. Trudy, the bag woman, is eager host to a group of extra-terrestrials who have come to investigate life on earth. Although Trudy describes herself as a dropout from the rational world (the old cliché about the mad seeing more clearly than the presumed sane), her chums from outer space are as real as Lynn's husband and lovers, the writer interviewing the prostitutes, any figure whom Tomlin does not embody. They are the occasion for a great many sci-fi gags and also for standard perceptions in which the obliquity of the outsider puts the familiar into sharper focus (v. Oliver Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*). Much of the attraction of the show lies in funny lines, simple jokes, or pointed aphorisms ("It's hard to be politically conscious and upwardly mobile at the same time"), and in the Wagner-Tomlin familiarity with the shifting trendiness of American life.

The play wants to be something more than funny. The first act ends with Agnus Angst, the teen-age punker, crying out that pain hurts. Agnus does not appear in the second act, which is mainly given over to Lynn's account of her life and her friendship with the man-hungry Marge and the radical lesbian Edie. Oddly enough, the thematic movement in that act lies outside Lynn; the positive image (a sign of intelligent life?) that replaces Agnus's first-act curtain is a shared moment involving several other Tomlin characters. Wagner says that she began with "the quantum inseparability principle," but the connectedness she celebrates is a social and psychological desideratum, not a scientific fact. It appears an imposition on the satiric material of the play, sustained only by the personality of the performer when, exuding exhilaration, she returns as herself at the end of *The Search*.

Bernadette Peters plays just one character in the long solo performance that provides the first act of *Song & Dance*. Her Emma is an English girl who comes to America and carries her attractive vulnerability through a series of disastrous love affairs. Somehow she manages to become a highly successful hat designer (I kept wanting to hear the old Danny Kaye number, "Anatole of Paris") and discovers one day, looking in the mirror, that she has become as hard and brittle as the world she moves in. She decides to revert to her earlier self, a decision which, like everything in her story, is arbitrary and a little foolish. There is no substance to Emma except the wit and intensity that Peters brings to the songs that recount her adven-

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tures. Since the music is by Andrew Lloyd Webber, the songs are as pedestrian as Emma's life, although I assume that such is not Webber's intention. Christopher d'Amboise is the lead dancer and the only character in Act II of the show, but he has the assistance of a group of talented dancers. Unfortunately, what they are asked to do seems as ordinary as the songs of Act I would be without the presence of Peters. D'Amboise plays one of Emma's lovers, and at the end she moseys on stage, dances an awkward step or two, and Webber brings the disparate sections of his concert-cum-play together in an ending as happy as the joining of two unwritten characters could be.

Bernadette Peters and Lily Tomlin are so good at what they do that it is almost a misfortune that the notoriously downbeat ending of *The Iceman Cometh* is so much more fulfilling than the modified upbeat of the Peters and Tomlin vehicles.

GERALD WEALES

Books: VILLAINS & RECIPES TO KILL

NICARAGUA
REVOLUTION IN THE FAMILY
Shirley Christian
Random House, $19.95, 337 pp.

Robert E. White

THREE years after the fall of the Somoza government, Shirley Christian accused her fellow reporters of naïveté and worse in their reporting on the Sandinista movement. Drawing on selected pieces, primarily from *New York Times* correspondent Alan Riding and *Washington Post* reporter Karen de Young, Ms. Christian found these journalists so obsessed with the evils of the Somozas that they failed in their duty to inform their readers of the Marxist-Leninist bent of the Sandinistas.

Yet in *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*, Shirley Christian concentrates so relentlessly on building a prosecutor's case against the Sandinistas that she must now stand in the same dock where she placed her colleagues. In order to make the sins of the Sandinistas stand out in bold relief, the author first mutes and softens the grim record of the Somoza dynasty. She then proceeds to indict the Sandinistas for plotting to install a Marxist-Leninist totalitarian state which would turn quickly and willingly to Moscow and Havana.

A reasonably objective capsule summary of modern Nicaragua up to the Reagan administration would begin by noting that the Somoza family controlled Nicaragua for almost half a century and intended to go on ruling it as their personal fief. From the beginning, the Somozas and their National Guard exploited and corrupted the country. Cash payments from ruled to ruler constituted the principal nexus between citizens and their government. Contraband, prostitution, gambling, illegal immigration were all run for profit by the guardsmen with kickbacks up and down the line. In the early years violence was selective, but as the revolutionary movement gathered strength, torture, rape, arbitrary arrest, murder, and bombing of civilian targets became indiscriminate, as reports by Amnesty International and other respected human rights groups bear out.

The Somoza dynasty invited its own end when, after the 1974 earthquake, official theft of international relief funds through self-awarded contracts alienated a previously compliant business and financial community. Leaders of that key sector found the courage to join the drive to oust the Somozas in part because of their perception that the dictator no longer enjoyed uncritical Washington support.

The daring exploits of the young Sandinista revolutionaries fired the valor of the Nicaraguan people who went into the streets to fight the guard. At the last moment a divided Carter administration tried to frustrate a Sandinista-led military victory through a defective scheme to force President Anastasio Somoza into exile, create a new government of moderate civilians, and merge the revolutionary army with a purged National Guard from which the worst butchers had been expelled. Somoza fled. The guard disintegrated. The rebels triumphed. The revolutionary government quickly carried out impressive programs of education, health, and land redistribution.

They also began to display disturbing anti-democratic tendencies and move closer to Cuba. After a year-and-a-half of confusing and contradictory signals from the Carter administration, Ronald Reagan became president and within weeks had a program under way to overthrow the revolutionary government.

There is much that is valuable in this book. Shirley Christian writes wonderfully well. She counterpoints various actors in the unfolding Nicaraguan tragedy and has each one speak for himself. These voices of contra leaders, market women, and revolutionaries have an authentic ring. The chapter entitled "The Challenge to the Church," is particularly informative and contains good description and sound analysis of the conflicts within the Catholic church in Nicaragua.

Yet in the end the judgment must be made that this is a book at war with itself, a schizophrenic work, where the conclusions of the author contradict the facts she herself presents. The book's thesis is succinctly stated in the epilogue: "The leaders of the Sandinista Front intended to establish a Leninist system from the day they marched into Managua whether they called it that or not."

The weight of evidence presented by the author seems to demonstrate precisely the opposite. The Sandinistas ignored Lenin's first rule which dictates that even before final victory the vanguard must seize and consolidate power. The months following Somoza's downfall were marked by confusion, hesitation, and open disagreement among Sandinistas and non-Sandinistas

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alike. The author captures the mood in this sentence: "An intimate dance began among all the elements that sought power, influence, and voice. Authority seemed up for grabs, available to whoever dared pronounce himself on a topic. After nearly five decades in which power rested in one last name, there was now no understanding about who had a mandate to do what."

Not only did the Sandinistas lack any semblance of a plan to seize total control, they were willing to give command of their combined armies to a declared anti-Marxist. The book tells how only six months before the final victory and with the revolution gathering strength each day, Daniel and Umberto Ortega, two of the author's worst villains, "offered to make Pastora supreme military commander of the unified Sandinista Front." Had the charismatic hero Eden Pastora accepted the proffered title and power, he could well have become the maximum leader of Nicaragua instead of going into exile and armed opposition. The author does not even attempt to resolve the contradiction between her claim that the Sandinistas intended to exercise absolute power in the Leninist sense of the phrase and their willingness to place all military forces in the hands of the pro-democratic, anti-Communist, bourgeois Catholic Eden Pastora.

Reporters demonstrate their commitment to objectivity and detachment not only by what they put into their writing but by what they leave out. Shirley Christian gives the contras substantial treatment. The two political leaders of the contra movement with the best democratic credentials, Adolfo Calero and Arturo Cruz, appear throughout the book and provide important source material. One chapter is entitled, "The Contra and Ronald Reagan," and another, "Among Those Who Left." The epilogue discusses United States policy and its effect on Nicaragua and concludes that, "In essence, while it is true that without the contra, circumstances in Nicaragua may have been marginally better in economic terms, its existence — along with all of the external and internal pressures — represented what little hope there was to force the Sandinista Front into accepting major structural changes toward an open political system."

Shirley Christian presumably came to this most dubious judgment regarding the value of the contras on the basis of the research that went into this book. Yet in the many pages of reporting on the counter-revolutionary force, its origins, personalities, and development, there appears no discussion of the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in creating, guiding, and maintaining the contras. This is roughly the equivalent of writing an account of the activities of the Bulgarian Communist apparat without discussing the role of the Soviet KGB. Nowhere in the book will the reader find two consecutive paragraphs dealing with the connection between the CIA and the contras. In fact, the fullest treatment of this key subject will be found in a footnote on page 200.

It is not necessary to be an admirer of the Sandinistas to recognize that the overthrow of the Somoza tyranny ushered in one of the mildest revolutions Latin America has ever seen or is ever likely to see. Unlike the Mexican Revolution early in this century, the Sandinistas did not kill American citizens, did not expropriate foreign-owned enterprises, did not persecute the church. Unlike the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the Nicaraguans did not resort to peoples' courts and drumhead executions, did not repudiate the enormous debts piled up by the predatory dictatorship they ousted, did not quit the Organization of American States.

The Sandinistas have committed their share of follies and excesses, and continue to do so. They have censored the opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, introduced Marxism into the classroom, offended the hierarchy by keeping undisciplined priests in government posts, and brought the East-West conflict to Central America by giving large numbers of Cuban advisors a role in the new Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas claim these measures were forced on them by the United States intervention, a plausible case.

From the outset the Nicaraguan revolutionaries had just cause to fear the United States would attempt to over-

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throw their government. The people of the United States may not remember but the people of Latin America will never forget the CIA-sponsored counter-revolution in Guatemala in 1954, the attack against Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1962, the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, and the destabilization of the Allende Government in Chile 1973. In the context of this record the Sandinistas understandably became suspicious when the Pentagon refused their request for arms and training. The suspicions mounted to near certainty when in 1980 the CIA openly lobbied Congress against a $75 million loan to Nicaragua on the grounds that the country was already lost to Communism. In 1981 the Reagan administration confirmed their worst fears with the creation of the contras.

The problem with the Sandinistas is not so much that they are Marxists but that they are soldiers. When threatened they tend to think of the Nicaraguan people as an army which must have discipline and direction if they are successfully to defend their revolution against its enemies.

The creation of the contras, far from aiding democracy, has done that worthy cause close to irreparable harm. Without the threat of a foreign-sponsored invasion, the Sandinista junta would lack any pretext to suspend civil liberties and tighten security. Leaders of Nicaragua's still independent, but diminished, free institutions could oppose the Sandinistas without the taint of being equated with those who took up arms against their government at the bidding of outsiders.

The last two commanders of the United States' military forces in Central America have both stated with or without our aid the contras cannot overthrow the government of Nicaragua. Yet at the same time the Reagan administration has made it clear it will not negotiate with the Sandinistas. Eliot Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, is only the latest to confirm this attitude when he said it was "preposterous" to think we could deal with the Sandinistas. If victory is impossible and diplomacy is ruled out then this administration does not have a policy towards Nicaragua; all it has is a recipe to kill people. This is another contradiction which Shirley Christian fails to resolve as she poses the dilemma for the United States as a choice between national security and national conscience.

Misfits tell a lot

THE GOOD TERRORIST
Doris Lessing
Knopf, $16.95, 375 pp.

Robert Ochs

IT IS an indication of a writer's scope and richness to be claimed by many disparate groups of people as their own. Doris Lessing's claimants have come from the ranks of feminists, the political left, radical psychiatry, and recently the enthusiasts of space fiction and fantastic literature. Each of these groups tends to ignore or be disconcerted by "the other" Doris Lessing.

Much of Mrs. Lessing's own work has been about this human tendency to categorize and to think in terms of either/or. Her most famous novel, *The Golden Notebook*, even in its structure (of black, red, yellow, and blue notebooks being subsumed by the golden one) is devoted to this idea. It is about the breakdown of a mind agonized by the oppositions of modern civilization between politics and artistic integrity. The heroine's mind recovers when these opposites are seen to merge and coincide, when the barriers between them dissolve. And among Mrs. Lessing's space fiction novels, the lyrical *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* continued the theme even in its title.

The notion of Doris Lessing as a former realistic novelist gone mystical is another unfortunate stereotype. Her realistic fiction had mystical and dream elements from the start, while the spiritual Doris Lessing is tough-minded indeed. Her space fiction is a liberating device permitting the examination of

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human history with fresh eyes.

Shikasta, the first of these books that go by the name of the "Canopus" series is an almost biblical story about visitors from a more substantial and saner world, which itself is never described. What is described is how our broken planet ("shikasta" is Persian for broken) appears to these messengers or warners. Their view is decidedly unflattering. To them we are blind, self-deceived, in desperate need of patient and very elementary instruction. The latest of the series, *The Sentimental Agents*, laid in some distant galactic empire, is a satire on the sentimentality and corrosiveness of political rhetoric.

As such, it is kin to her new book, *The Good Terrorist*, set in contemporary London. Though not a satire, it presents its exasperating heroine and her predicament in a distinctly lively tone which invites the reader to find her behavior more comic than deplorable. She is Alice, a thirty-six-year-old idealistic woman who is cook, manager, purse, nanny, and ombudsperson for a commune of amateur radicals yearning to be tested and accepted for more dangerous tasks. Alice dutifully runs the house while the others theorize about the revolution and take part in demonstrations. Mrs. Lessing draws us into her own fascination with this type of contradictory person who cannot, for example, imagine how anyone could obey an order to destroy a condemned but habitable house, or stop other people from living, and yet who eventually takes part in a bombing that does both.

Alice is still very much a child. And not just in the metaphorical sense of an adult with lingering infantile dependencies. She takes it as a personal affront that her mother sells her childhood home, or breaks off with old friends Alice misses, or even that she grows old. Alice requires that the ambience of her childhood remain just as it was, while she goes about her rebellion.

Comrade Andrew, a KGB recruiter who sees how she has turned the commune (the "squat") into a palace, thinks he sees potential in her, while he dismisses the two male leaders of the commune as "Errol Flynns." "You are tired, Comrade Alice. You work and you work, and most of these people aren't worth it." As a first step toward her becoming seriously professional, he advises a holiday. To her complete amazement! She cannot understand why he is always wanting her to do such middle-class things. The functioning of Alice's mind depends on the absolute opposition between the world of her parents and that of her radical companions. On the not infrequent occasions when her shrewder comrades analyze the world with the very voice her mother uses, she gets confused.

Alice is a shifting assembly of conflicting voices and selves which never sort themselves out. One part is very canny in dealing with people — with bureaucrats, the police, fellow squatters, even with some of the real professionals, the KGB and British intelligence types who scout the group. Another (almost buried) part is philosophical, assessing her life as it unfolds. Because we can side sympathetically with this reflective part of Alice, the story gains an added dimension of dramatic suspense. We wonder if Alice will heed the urgent, instinctive voices that warn her she is nearly lost. She barely registers these warnings somewhere inside, before they are overwhelmed by the next call on her attention.

"It is by the failures and misfits of a civilization that one can best judge its weaknesses." This quotation from an unknown author stands at the head of Doris Lessing's first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*. She is evidently still interested in misfits, and still analyzing them to get a reading on our culture. Is it that the normal people who fit comfortably into a society ignore or repress the society's contradictions, while the misfits bear the full brunt?

Of all the sharply conceived minor characters, Alice's mother Dorothy is most remarkable, and an ironic counterpoint to Alice. She is no misfit, but that other Lessing favorite, the survivor. Her misfortunes have provided leverage for considerable stock-taking. In the argument where she breaks with an old friend from her marching, singing, and demonstrating days, she delivers the results of her thinking, in some of the most crackling passages in the book.

The Good Terrorist is probably the least startling new Lessing appearance in a long time. It comes after the astonishingly varied Canopus fantasies and the hoax of publishing a pair of books under

CAVEAT LECTOR
TRANSLATION PITFALLS

WHEN THE VATICAN took severe measures against the Brazilian liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, we heard a plea which is raised repeatedly during such controversies. Rome, it is said, should restrain its interventions on theological issues and generally leave such questions to be settled in the circles competent to engage in theological critique and dialogue. But what, then, is the responsibility of translators, editors, and publishers to provide the theological community and the wider concerned public with reliable sources upon which to base their deliberation and discernment?

This question occurred to me while I was, in fact, preparing a review of Father Boff's *Church: Charism and Power* (Crossroad, 1984) for the Winter 1985 issue of the quarterly journal *Church*, published by the National Pastoral Life Center in New York. I was dismayed to discover that if Father Boff's book had been roughly treated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it had received equally distressing treatment at the hands of its translator, editor, and publisher. The text published in this country is replete with gratuitous omissions, inexcusable carelessness, and damaging misrepresentations. Let me cite some instances:

● Page 26 of the American edition quotes Pope Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*, paragraph 46, as saying: "Politics is the best way — if not the only way — of living out one's Christian commitment, in service to others." The barest familiarity with the writings of this most nuanced of popes makes the likelihood of so blatant an assertion

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a pseudonym (*The Diary of a Good Neighbor* and *If the Old Could . . .* by "Jane Somers"). *The Good Terrorist* belongs to a genre she has described as an outpost of journalism, the documenting of "an area of society, a type of person, not yet admitted to the general literate consciousness." Most contemporary novels are of this type, in contrast to the works of "writers in the old sense, who used the novel for philosophical statements about life."

Doris Lessing has worked often in this more ambitious form, but here seems to be taking a holiday. But again, it would be foolish to speak too much in terms of either/or. Her new book gives more than a taste of the contemplative Doris Les-

simply inconceivable. The standard English translation, published by the United States Catholic Conference, confirms the intuition. The pope's actual statement reads: "Politics are a demanding manner — but not the only one — of living the Christian commitment to the service of others."

The question, then, follows: was it Boff or Boff's translator who thus adapted the pope's position? In the original Portuguese edition, Boff quotes the pope's words: "*A política é uma maneira exigente – se bem que nâo seja a única. . . .*" Clearly, Boff's citation is faithful to Paul VI, while the translator distorts both Boff and the pope.

● A second striking instance is the translator's choice for rendering Boff's technical term, "*cristandade*." In the highly sensitive essay, "Characteristics of the Church in a Class Society," this term appears several times translated as "institutional Christianity" and is contrasted with the church represented by the base communities. The unmistakable impression conveyed is that Boff maintains an opposition in principle between such base communities and the institutional church (an impression reinforced by the poles suggested in the subtitle created for the U.S. edition, "Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church"). Were this the case, Boff's commitment to a Catholic ecclesiology might indeed be considered suspect.

But, in fact, Boff's term "*cristandade*" refers to that particular configuration of ecclesiastical and political power which in English is called "Christendom." To render it as "institutional Christianity," especially in the current charged atmosphere, is so misleading as to border on the irresponsible. Boff's own view, which even the translator cannot quite mask, is that "the antagonism is not between institution and community," but between *cristandade* and a church which has made an option for the poor and stands with the poor.

● One last example of how the translation serves Boff poorly may be found on page 123, where a sentence reads: "Apostolic succession is not limited to hierarchical function, which divides the community." The reader, coming upon this categorical statement, might be excused for wondering whether, in Boff's mind, hierarchy is, of itself, divisive. Now what the American translation purports to represent is actually a much longer and more nuanced sentence which appears on page 194 of the Portuguese original. It reads in my rendition: "Apostolic succession, however, cannot be reduced to the hierarchical functions, because such reduction would introduce, from the very beginning, a division between 'haves' and 'have nots' in the church; the division of ministries only comes subsequently and is based upon a profound fraternity and equality." I find Boff's own assertion fully in line with the ecclesial vision expounded in *Lumen Gentium*. Once again the translator does Boff considerable disservice.

● That disservice extends to the book's editing as well. Absolutely no indication is given, in the United States edition, that we have here anything other than a book conceived and composed as a single whole by its author. Yet an encounter with the text soon gives rise to the suspicion that we are dealing with collected essays, composed on different occasions and intended for different audiences. One "chapter" runs twenty-three pages and is amplified by sixty-nine notes, referring to books and articles in several languages; another "chapter" barely reaches six pages and contains not a single footnote. No explanation for such imbalance is forthcoming from the "Editor's Note" which solemnly presides over the book's opening and evokes the "controversy" surrounding it. No illumination of the book's strange structure is provided by what is presented as the author's original preface, reproduced in the United States edition.

Illumination is forthcoming as soon as one consults the Portuguese edition. One discovers that the entire first paragraph of the author's preface has simply been omitted from the U.S. edition. The deleted paragraph speaks of "this collection of studies and viewpoints," some of which had been previously published in different reviews, others of which were previously unpublished. This information is of great moment to a reader seeking to understand the book's genesis and literary form.

● Editorial "creativity" does not end there. Throughout the text, particular references to the church in Latin America or to the specific religious situation in Brazil are excised and are given a speciously universal character, becoming simply "the church" or "the religions." In the interests of winning a wider audience, concerns about specific contexts and perspectives, concerns which are liberation theology's great strength, have been rendered innocuous and even falsified.

To the extent that Father Boff's true positions have been obscured or misrepresented in this U.S. edition, he has been effectively "silenced" by his own book! With friends like these, who needs a Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith?

ROBERT IMBELLI

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sing. It has the distinctive Lessing style (which many understandably wish were more elegant), with its flavor of being businesslike in the quest for understanding, choosing to take more pains to be lucid than to enchant. A style in the service of a compassionate but unsentimental exploration of human life.

The second Bunker Hill

COMMON GROUND
J. Anthony Lukas
Knopf, $19.95, 659 pp.

Maurice deG. Ford

I CAN only write in awe of J. Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground*. Part of this is for personal reasons. I had been closely involved with many of the lawyers for the plaintiffs in the Boston School Desegregation case, the focal point of Mr. Lukas's book. My parents had spent most of their professional lives in the Boston public school system and I had written a number of articles about the case and "the troubles" in Boston. I had even attempted a book, but gave up. The strands of the tapestry were so various and so mixed, events kept moving and moving (only in August 1985 did Judge W. Arthur Garrity get out of the case and return the system to a newly reconstituted Boston School Committee) and it simply seemed too close in time to make any measured historical judgment.

Then, too, there was the old problem of academe — how could one evaluate anything? What variables should one put into the multiple regression analysis, and would this really tell us what impacted upon what? Moreover, nothing in the mountains that had been written on the situation in Boston even came close to accurately portraying what was going on.

Then, a little like Milton coming upon Chapman's *Homer*, I read and reread and reread J. Anthony Lukas's *Common Ground*, and walked away each time with an ever deeper amaze. Lukas's book is not only a work of consummate genius, but is instructive to anyone who would attempt an analysis of a complex, close-in-time event. In the first place, despite the far more than seven years of meticulously checked research that went into *Common Ground*, Mr. Lukas avoids the trap of trying to overwhelm us with statistics or to scientifically evaluate anything, so much the fashion in modern sociology. Nor does he get mired in the legal thicket so well known to me.

This is the story of three families, each of which was subjected not only to Judge Garrity's desegregation order, but, more significantly, to the unheavenly environment that is Boston — and increasingly the racially, ethnically, and socially oppressed reality that characterizes too many of our cities. Mr. Lukas's technique borrows from the participant-observer tradition of Oscar Lewis's *La Vida*, Anthony Lewis's *Gideon's Trumpet*, and Richard Kluger's *Simple Justice* (until now the best book written on school desegregation, demonstrating an equal amount of effort). But in its breadth, its nuance, and its quality as literature, though a piece of non-fiction, *Common Ground* is no less than Shakespearian. Like the dyer's hand, J. Anthony Lukas has *become* that which he works in.

In his prefatory note describing how he tried to get a handle on the happenings in Boston over the last decade, Mr. Lukas says: "The three families at the center of my story were not selected as statistical averages or norms. On the contrary, I was drawn to them by a special intensity, an engagement with life, which made them stand out from their social context. At first, I thought I read clear moral imperatives in the geometry of their intersecting lives, but the more time I spent with them, the harder it became to assign easy labels of guilt or virtue. The realities of urban America . . . proved far more complicated than I had imagined."

Mr. Lukas literally lived with these families over the years of his book, tasting their sorrows, and sometimes joys. Black Rachel Twymon, raising her six children alone in a church-sponsored housing project in Roxbury, sees the effects of busing on her daughter, Cassandra, a member of the first group of blacks sent, in the fall of 1975, into the tight Irish isle of Charlestown amidst a hail of bottles, epithets, and stones.

Equally trapped in *her* Charlestown housing project, Alice McGoff, a widow raising seven children, joins the mothers' marches and group Hail Marys sponsored by ROAR — Restore Our Alienated Rights — against the "invaders" on their "turf." At Charlestown High, which resembles more an armed camp than an institution of lower learning, little green and white stickers soon appear on the lockers of the seniors — TLWC — nostalgically proclaiming The Last White Class.

The third family is that of Colin and Joan Diver and their children, Yankees. A member of the *Harvard Law Review*, class of 1968, Colin Diver forgoes a job with a prominent Washington law firm in the aftermath of Martin Luther King's assassination to answer Mayor Kevin White's call to white liberals to live in and work for the betterment of the city. The Divers move into Boston's South

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End, not far from Rachel Twymon and her family. They, too, send their children to the public schools and become subject to Judge Garrity's order and the maelstrom of urban violence.

Among these seemingly disparate families, Mr. Lukas finds common ground. The McGoffs and the Twymons, victimized by urban poverty, violence, alcohol, and drugs, become, in turn, victimizers. Freddie Twymon's favorite victims become people like the Divers and their white, professional friends, who have moved into the South End to gentrify it. But the Divers, despite the best of intentions, are victimizers too, because their coming drives up the cost and rent of property and drives out the blacks who live there. There are few winners in *Common Ground*, at least on the mundane, factual level. But the McGoffs, Twymons, and Divers have a grittiness of spirit about them which makes them very winsome. At least they *try*, and are survivors.

The Divers, at least, have options. At the book's end, exhausted by the crime around them (Colin Diver sleeps with a thick lead pipe next to his pillow) and the incessant political nature of Mayor Kevin White's administration, they move out to the white picket fence suburbs, where Judge Garrity lives. If there is any hero, it is probably he. He had no choice, under the constitution, but to rule as he did and was prevented, by the Burger Court, from making the suburbs part of a metropolitan desegregation plan. The McGoffs, Twymons, and others trapped in the city rightly experienced this as very inequitable. But Lukas is critical of the judge as well, suggesting that he should not have thrown Roxbury and South Boston together in the first year of the busing, and that he could have been more flexible in keeping some schools intact where integration seemed to be working, although they did not fit exactly into his rigid desegregation formula.

Interspersed amidst the ongoing saga of the three families are chapters which are probably the best short biographies ever written of Cardinals Cushing and Medeiros, Chairwoman Louise Day Hicks, Editor Tom Winship and *The Boston Globe*, Mayor White, and Judge Garrity. Laced with telling anecdotes and done with historical overview, these sketches reveal that, despite their temporary eminence, these main actors in the Boston drama also share common ground with those subject to their edicts. One need only go back a generation or two to discover that they once were immigrants all. Cardinal Cushing was from "Southie," Kevin White's wife grew up in Charlestown, as did Judge Garrity's forebears, in circumstances not far removed from the McGoffs'.

Mr. Lukas describes all with humor and great empathy. Mrs. Hicks, for all her negative image in the liberal press as bigoted "Boston's Head Mother," worked quietly behind the scenes, and, in many more open ways, risked her political career to prevent the violence over busing in South Boston. Cardinal Medeiros, a devout, quiet Portuguese, simply didn't have the political clout of his Irish predecessor nor the will to confront mobs hostile to busing in Charlestown.

Common Ground has already been the object of extraordinary critical acclaim.

Photo: Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

CANNED GOODS as Caviar

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GERALD WEALES

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On September 28, 1985, it was the centerpiece of a gathering of over 500 participants in, and commentators on, the struggle over busing at the John F. Kennedy Library on Columbia Point in Dorchester. All were a little grayer and, perhaps, a tad wiser. Yet despite strenuous efforts to draw a broad spectrum of people together, few working-class Charlestown or South Boston whites showed up. Even the McGoffs did not come. As Mr. Lukas noted: "We were deadly serious at this conference to bring Bostonians together, not Harvard professors and governmental officials. That we were only partially successful, I deeply regret."

That same night, in Charlestown, a popular Boston disk jockey made the mistake of bringing his son and a black friend in his van near Charlestown's Bunker Hill housing project, McGoffville, if you will. As they emerged from a restaurant, they were set upon by an angry mob, throwing rocks and shouting racial crudities. The wound on the face of the disk jockey, Jim Julian, required nineteen stitches. He later said ruefully: "It didn't occur to me that I was taking a black man into Charlestown. I wasn't thinking. It was stupid."

J. Anthony Lukas hopes, and I hope, that *Common Ground* will reach the wide audience it so eloquently deserves. Insight can be a source for healing. Yet one cannot help but wonder which groups in Boston will, in fact, read it, let alone this review.

Hebrew free rhythms

THE ART OF BIBLICAL POETRY

Robert Alter

Basic Books, $17.95, 216 pp.

Robert W. Funk

ROBERT ALTER has written a new book on Hebrew poetry as a sequel to his *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981). Like the earlier volume, it is a well-crafted work, a delight to read.

Hebrew verse is marked by "free rhythm," which means that it is "a cluster of changing principles," including stress, syntax, and meaning. No one item dominates to the exclusion of others, and the elements occur in a variety of configurations. That is what has made it difficult for scholars to come to a clear understanding of Hebrew verse over the last two centuries. Benjamin Hrushovski, however, has cleared away all the misconceptions and false starts in a few pages of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971), and Robert Alter has put those brilliant insights to work in his review of verse in Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and the Prophets, as well as in scattered other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.

Actually, Alter restricts his observations to semantic parallelism, since stress and syntax cannot readily be reproduced in translation. But parallelism of meaning is quite adequate to his purposes in most instances. He elects to call the unit of poetry the "verset," with Hrushovski, in part because traditional terms like hemistich and colon (plural: cola) carry wrong overtones. A verset is a half-line in the case of dyadic parallelism, a third-line in triadic parallelism.

The author vigorously opposes the widely accepted notion of synonymous parallelism: the first two lines of Psalm 24 are not, strictly speaking, identical in meaning, according to Alter: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof/the world and those who dwell therein." Rather, Alter argues in a series of persuasive examples, there is normally a dynamic movement from one half-line to the next, as in this pair of lines from Isaiah 59:9-10: "We hope for light and behold! darkness,/for effulgence, and in gloom we go./We grope like blind men a wall,/like the eyeless we grope." The movement is from ordinary to more literary terms ("light" > "effulgence"; "darkness" > "gloom"); the second line thus intensifies the first.

This is but one example of several types of dynamic movement Alter finds in Hebrew verse. Others are: a heightening or intensification takes place through focusing (cities of Judea/streets of Jerusalem); through movement from the literal to the figurative (your lot/one purse); by replacing a verb with a noun or adjective; and by many other such de-

THE U.S. Commissioner of Education is not the only voice currently urging Americans to read the classics. Jaroslav Pelikan puts the issue matter-of-factly: ". . . we are . . . better equipped to deal with tradition

***The Vindication of Tradition**, by Jaroslav Pelikan. Yale University Press, $10.95, 105 pp.*

than were our scholarly predecessors, although they and their audiences may have had a better concrete grasp of . . . specific traditions than we do."

What has changed? According to Pelikan in *The Vindication of Tradition*, we are more "sensitive to the ways in which our past has used its past." This little collection of four NEH Jefferson Lectures, given across the country by a major church historian, is a measured, undefensive defense of the ways in which tradition transmits itself. It is well illustrated with examples from art, literature, liturgy, and doctrine.

In his much talked-about book, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Brian Stock, who is a Fellow of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, argues that writing did not *replace* an oral tradition in

***The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries**, by Brian Stock. Princeton University Press, $45, 604 pp.*

the Middle Ages. Instead, writing created a whole new network of interdependencies. Heresy, for example, became something different in a "tex-

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vices. On the whole, the nascent taxonomy of parallelism provided by Alter is convincing and certainly illuminating. We can be certain that he has made significant progress in the analysis of Hebrew verse.

Space prohibits the elaboration of the larger structures he describes in the Book of Job, of his acute observations on aphorisms and proverbs (one-liners like "Spare the rod and spoil the child"), and of the differences he develops between prophetic poetry and prose, on the one hand, and between prophetic poetry and poetry elsewhere, on the other. And

Religious booknotes

Tradition, miracle, time, & poetics

Mary Gerhart

tual community" from what it was in an "oral community." Another result of the rise of a more literate society was a different approach to the idea of reform. "Ressourcement," or return to one's roots, became a functioning reality, according to Stock, who will address the American Academy of

***Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Studies**, by John Barton. Westminster Press, $12.95 paper, 272 pp.*

Religion at a general session in November. Stock also draws out the implications of literacy in the Middle Ages for critical thinkers today.

A lucid and engaging account of nineteenth- and twentieth-century approaches to the Bible can be found in John Barton's *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Studies*. His lively discussion of form criticism, redaction-criticism, structuralism, and post-structuralism — to name only a few of the methods he includes — accounts for the rise and demise of each approach, together with the contributions and limitations of each. Unlike many authors of meta-criticism, Barton has made his book accessible to the non-specialist by using terms like "literary competence," which he compares with the more familiar "linguistic competence." Also, he "reads" the Book of Ecclesiastes from different approaches, giving the reader a first-hand experience of them.

Miracle in the Early Christian World by Howard Kee is a new appreciation of the subject. Claiming that our understanding of miracle has suffered from a reductionist posture since

***Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method**, by Howard Clark Kee. Yale University Press, $22.50, 320 pp.*

the Enlightenment — when the major contemporary lines of attack and defense were fashioned — Kee develops an approach that takes its clue from the sociology of knowledge. Kee discovers that the function of miracle changes in different contexts. For instance, miracle sometimes means "cosmic portents of change," at others "ministration to personal needs." For Kee, the event of miracle is always public and its significance restricted to those who can understand it. His typology of the different functions of miracle in the ancient and early Christian worlds moves the dis-

***The Poetics of Belief: Studies in Coleridge, Arnold, Pater, Santayana, Stevens, and Heidegger**, by Nathan A. Scott, Jr. University of North Carolina Press, $24, 198 pp.*

cussion beyond the issue of "facticity."

Like the event of miracle, so, too, the experience of imagination is in need of rediscovery. So argues Nathan A. Scott in *Poetics of Belief*, a collection of essays on six writers who championed the idea. The world is never "simply *what it is*," says Scott, repudiating G.E. Moore's one-sided philosophy. Rather, we live in a world which is neither the known nor the unknown, but one in which there is always a "surplusage of meaning in what is known." Scott captures the distinctive flavor of imagination for each of the six writers: for example, the "dignity" of poetic imagination (Coleridge); "transcendence downward" (Stevens); poetry as "ontology" (Heidegger). Scott takes the poetic imagination to be an emblem of radical freedom and inventiveness possible to all human beings.

In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur returns to two classical thinkers to construct a dialectic between time experienced as discordant and ultimately undefinable (Augustine), and

Time and Narrative, Vol. I, by Paul Ricoeur. Chicago University Press, $25, 274 pp.

time experienced as predominantly concordant in the action of following a plot (Aristotle). Ricoeur's argument is that historical events are basically similar to events framed by a plot: Both historical events and plotted events are indirectly initiated in narrative structure. He thinks that historical events are "fated" to be expanded into long time-spans. Such expansions set up a tension between the narrative "emplotment" of events as history and the "emplotment" of our own lived experience. Ricoeur also restores the significance of the concept "event" to contemporary models of history which have been dominated by economic and social explanations. In a second volume to follow, Ricoeur will relate historical and fictional emplotment.

Traditions are lost or retrieved — for better or worse — and rarely forgotten. These books make the act of remembering tradition into an art.

MARY GERHART

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these are to mention only a few memorable items on a much longer list. I found myself reading and rereading sections in order to soak up the rich detail of a master at close reading, and in order to ponder the consequences of sweeping generalizations (e.g., there is virtually no epic poetry in the Hebrew Bible).

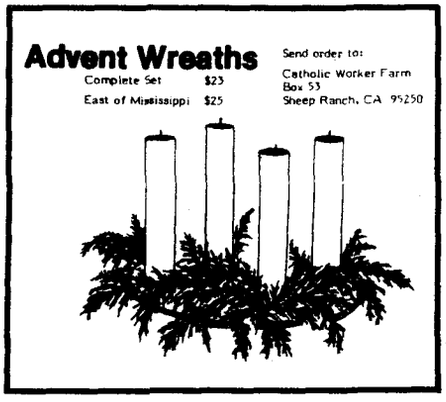
It is a pity that this book, like the earlier one on Hebrew narrative, is marked by what seems to me an excessively critical attitude towards biblical scholarship. Yet Alter is not alone in his vituperations. Northrop Frye (*The Great Code*) and, to a lesser extent, Frank Kermode (*The Genesis of Secrecy*) are also down on biblical scholars. Frye is blunt: Critical biblical scholarship is of no use because it does not furnish a guide on how to read the Bible. This failure is the result of not having developed as a discipline: it did not emerge from lower criticism, but "dug itself into a still lower, or sub-basement, criticism in which disintegrating the text became an end in itself. As a result its essential discoveries were made quite early, and were followed by a good deal of straw-thrashing."

Alter is no less scathing. Narrative, Alter states, was "discovered" by biblical scholars barely a decade ago as a subject for investigation; while there is a vast literature on biblical poetry going back nearly two centuries, unfortunately, "most of what has been written is . . . misconceived" and "guided by rather dim notions of how poetry works." In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Alter writes frequently about the "dim" wits that biblical scholars are and suggests that they are like students who are laboring to learn a foreign language (in trying to master literary criticism), "whose accents and intonations they have not yet gotten right." Put more generally, both Alter and Frye charge that Bible scholars have dismembered the Bible line by line, tradition by tradition, source by source, redactor by redactor, until nothing is left worthy of comment: the Bible as book has been replaced by a series of unrelated fragments, a pastiche without design.

It is clear to me that much of this criticism, if not wholly merited, is painfully close to the mark. Bible scholars are not as adept at "literary" literary criticism as they ought to be; the kind of literary criticism they have practiced since the middle of the nineteenth century is historical: who wrote what, when, and where, and for what reasons? As Alter says, we have been preoccupied with seminars on law in the ancient Near East and with decorated pottery in the Late Bronze Age. At the same time, I may innocently observe that much that passes for literary criticism is not notably better than what passes for biblical criticism. Could it be that part of the peeve on the part of literary critics is the result of their absence from the biblical field for a century?

There is more to this exchange of insults than appears immediately on the surface. In Alter's case at least, I should put the hostility down to a fresh outbreak of conservatism. If we ask Professor Alter where in all creation he finds sensible observations on Hebrew narrative and poetry, he responds candidly: in the midrashim and in traditional Hebrew commentaries from late antiquity to the Renaissance. In other words, he wants to reinstate traditional ways of reading the biblical text, yet without falling into the trap of Jewish orthodoxy or Protestant fundamentalism.

I detect two impulses at work: one is the proclivity to contradict, as frequently as possible, every proposal to emend or partition the traditional Massoretic text, yet without becoming programmatic in its defense. The other is a streak of piety: in both books Alter hopes his way of reading the Bible will allow the "values and moral vision" of the Bible to break through. Modern biblical scholarship, it seems, has not lent itself well to the devotional reading of the Bible.



In quest of the bloody truth

IN COUNTRY
Bobbie Ann Mason
Harper & Row, $15.95, 247 pp.

Thomas DePietro

THE JUST plain folk of Bobbie Ann Mason's fiction first lumbered forth in her widely praised collection, *Shiloh and Other Stories*, and there her poor rubes seem to dwell in an interminable present. Their mundane lives (circumscribed partly by Mason's numbing use of the present tense) remain buried under an accumulation of intentionally extraneous details ("Well, facts is facts") and inarticulate dialogue (" 'I never was any good in English,' he says"). Mason's post-modern hicks typically work at Kroger's, shop at K-Mart, watch lots of TV, and occasionally dream of distant travel (to Florida or Arizona). Her prose signals REAL LIFE at every turn, and we're certainly meant to appreciate the passive heroism of those who endure it. But for a few nods to their Kentucky locales, these affectless tales could be by Raymond Carver, or Mary Robison, or Tobias Wolff, or Ann Beattie or . . . well, you get the idea. (If you don't, read any issue of the *New Yorker*.)

Shiloh offers some exceptions to be sure: "Detroit Skyline, 1949" and "Nancy Culpepper" among them. The latter, in particular, relies on an uncharacteristic point of view, that of a graduate-school-educated Kentuckian in exile, a woman no doubt much like Mason herself. (Like the author, she also lives in a small town outside Philadelphia.) In the story, what the protagonist Nancy (who's named after the kinswoman of the title) hopes to achieve by visiting her dying grandmother back west is what most of Mason's characters never even attempt: to connect with the past, a

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time before fast food and Phil Donahue.

For her first novel, *In Country*, Mason exploits every literary notion and skill at her limited command. Though her narrative insists on its contemporaneity, and assumes a deliberately naive voice, it's organized like "Nancy Culpepper" as an effort in historical retrieval and recreation. The historian is a seventeen-year-old girl, Sam Hughes of Hopewell, Kentucky, who struggles to understand nothing less than the Vietnam War in all its grim detail. Her Uncle Emmett tells his fellow Viet Vets who meet daily at McDonald's: Sam's "got Nam on the brain," and no wonder.

Sam's teenaged father (whom she never met) was killed in the early days of the war. Vietnam later turned Emmett (with whom she lives) and his cronies (one of whom she beds) into a bunch of zonked-out casualties. But the walking wounded — victims of Agent Orange, Sam insists — tell no tales because "nobody gives a shit." Sam's mother, remarried and living in Lexington, also wants her to forget, "to pretend," in Sam's words, that "the whole Vietnam War never existed," and in a way for Sam it never did. "All I can see in my mind is picture postcards," she worries throughout the novel. "It doesn't seem real. I can't believe it was really real."

For Sam, at any rate, reality is touch and go, distilled as it is through the sounds and images of popular culture. MTV provides the novel's soundtrack, and Bruce Springsteen is its most potent icon. Predictably, Sam's imagined Vietnam resembles a combination of *Apocalypse Now* (as seen on HBO) and the M*A*S*H reruns she and Emmett watch religiously on TV (even she knows the series isn't really about Korea). When she's not glued to the tube or hanging out at the Burger Boy with her knocked-up friend Dawn, Sam somehow finds time to read "dull history books." But they don't "say what it was like to be at war over there. The books didn't even have pictures."

Like Nancy of "Nancy Culpepper," Sam craves photographs, staring so much at likenesses of her father that "he was beginning to seem real." Much of the novel concerns Sam's dogged pursuit of such artifacts, and Mason includes a number of them in her text: mindless letters from Sam's father to his wife and parents, and the more revealing diary from his time in the jungle — an unexpected find which speaks directly to Sam's obsession.

Sipping Coke and reading her father's diary on a bench in the Paducah mall, Sam gags on his words ("dead gooks have a special stink") as it becomes clear he killed his share of Viet Cong without remorse. Before, the war had always been "like a horror movie. . . . Now everything seemed suddenly real. . . ." But not real enough. For as one of Emmett's buddies told Sam early on, until she's "humped the boonies" (i.e., survived "some godforsaken wilderness"), she'll never understand what it meant to go "in country." Her desperate attempt to recreate the Asian Jungle — the novel's first bit of real drama — finds her camping out in Cawood's Pond, "the last place in western Kentucky where a per-

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son could really face the wild." There, she fantasizes the sights and smells of Vietnam, with raccoons as V.C. and Granny Cakes as K-rations, but soon realizes something's wrong. No flares or rockets light the sky, no choppers or artillery pierce the quiet; this isn't war at all.

And besides, women don't kill. War, she determines, is American men "who've got to put on . . . cowboy boots and stomp around and show somebody a thing or two." When a frantic Emmett finds her the following day, he at last spills his guts, and tells her what "really happened." But she punctuates his long pent-up tale with the only reality she knows: "I saw something like that in a movie on TV."

Emmett's final maxim ("You can't learn from the past. The main thing you learn from history is that you can't learn from history.") forces us to realize another bloody truth. The bulk of this novel merely fleshes out another typically pointless Mason story. The narrative frame (the first twenty and last ten pages) simply recounts, in the present tense of course, what everything else in the book leads up to: a trip by Emmett, Sam, and Mamaw (her father's mother) to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in D.C. The monument, with its ambiguous imagery, is the source of Sam's equally ambiguous epiphany. Walking past the rows of names (with a copy of *Born in the U.S.A.* under her arm) Sam confirms Emmett's earlier lesson. She thinks: "she will never really know what happened to all these men in war."

This diminished fiction, though loaded with surface details, fails to achieve even the modest effect of a story like "Nancy Culpepper." Instead, that earlier voice, insistent in its sophistication, intrudes on Sam's media-cluttered consciousness. Out in the boonies, Sam recalls, "the poem from school about the man who had to wear a dead albatross"; at the monument, she thinks of "that guy who put pink plastic around those islands"; the monument itself she considers "something for future archaeologists to puzzle over, clues to a language." Though Mason begins with an admirable goal — to understand the aftershock of that horrible war abroad and those parlous times at home — she ends up trivializing both past and present. Snatches of rock lyrics and bits of TV dialogue provide Mason with an emotional shorthand; they're her cultural correlatives. But next to a pop masterpiece like *Born in the U.S.A.* or even *M*A*S*H*, *In Country* seems bloated, condescending to its characters, pretentious in its feigned naïveté. Stripped to its essence, it might make a decent young adult novel, or better yet, an after-school special on TV.

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REVIEWERS

ROBERT E. WHITE, *U.S. ambassador to El Salvador during the Carter administration, is president of the Center for Development Policy in Washington.*

ROBERT OCHS, S.J., *is the author of* The Death in Every Now.

MAURICE deG. FORD *teaches law and psychiatry at Harvard University.*

ROBERT W. FUNK *is professor of religion at the University of Montana.*

THOMAS DE PIETRO *is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Virginia.*

BETTE S. WEIDMAN *edited* White on Red: Images of the American Indian.

In Brief

NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE, *by Andrew Wiget, Twayne Publishers, $15.95, 147 pp.* THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID: CONTEMPORARY POETRY AND FICTION BY NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN, *edited by Rayna Green, Indiana University Press, $29.95, 329 pp.*

Here is cause for celebration: two books that prove that the revival of interest in American Indian literatures is no sentimental trend, but a substantial development in contemporary culture. Work in native languages, in the restoration of old translations, and in the fuller understanding of the political, economic, and social position of American Indians has been proceeding quietly for generations. Now we are coming into the harvest, beginning to be able to see how the work of daughters and sons builds on the efforts of those who have gone before as, in a favorite example, Ella DeLoria's *Dakota Texts* preserves a tradition for Vine DeLoria Jr. to defend in fiery political essays. Two recent landmarks in American Indian literary study are Dell Hymes's *In Vain I Tried to Tell You: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*, retranslations of Clackamas Chinook tales, and John Bierhorst's *Four Masterworks of American Indian Literature*. Now Andrew Wiget has written a short but satisfying introduction to this rewarding field of study.

Wiget begins with two chapters that describe various types of oral narrative — earth-diver, emergence and trickster stories — and oratory and oral poetry, some of it still performed, some known through the efforts of linguists and anthropologists. He then discusses early non-fiction, autobiography, poetry, and fiction produced by native Americans from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries, when popular wisdom expected "the Indian" to vanish. On the contrary, in the twentieth century there has been a burst of fiction and poetry written in English by native Amer-

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icans, among them D'Arcy McNickle, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Silko, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Wendy Rose, Simon Ortiz and many others whose work Wiget describes with tact and care.

Wiget's book helps us to place the writers represented in *That's What She Said,* an anthology of short fiction and poetry by seventeen American Indian women. In her introduction, Rayna Green provides a tender composite portrait of the writers for whom this book seeks attention. They have not only claimed their cultures, but made something new out of their own relations to a world they know as fruitful and terrible. They face social and political realities and private suffering, use their memories of old myths and images, give evidence in every word of their authenticity and liveliness. A photograph of each woman, brief biographies, a glossary of unfamiliar terms, and a full bibliography of works by and about native American women writers make this book a pleasure to use.

BETTE S. WEIDMAN

Correspondence

(Continued from page 596)

Christians — with all their suspicion and unknowingness about Jews and Judaism — would have the courage to oppose us without wishing to destroy us. There can be civility even in enmity; there is communication even out of the most profound disagreement; there may be clarity to emerge without expecting the church to dismantle its millennial structure of opposition to Jewish unbelief. The real panic which my position engenders is that it insists upon a hermeneutic of enmity without postulating an inevitable descent into violence. I oppose many ideas of this world, but I wish to obliterate no person holding them. Instead of the church tergiversating, sending contradictory signals to the Jews, mistaking the *realia* of Jewish existence and the Jews being saddened and disappointed, if only it were possible for us to speak truthfully out of the animus of theological and historical opposition, but always with the civil courage and respect for human persons that obviates violence. The difficulty for the church lies in the fact that it continues to believe that it *deserves* to be victorious over the Jews. It is this hidden persuasion that leaves me limp with rage against its presumption.

ARTHUR A. COHEN

Many victims

Maspeth, N.Y.

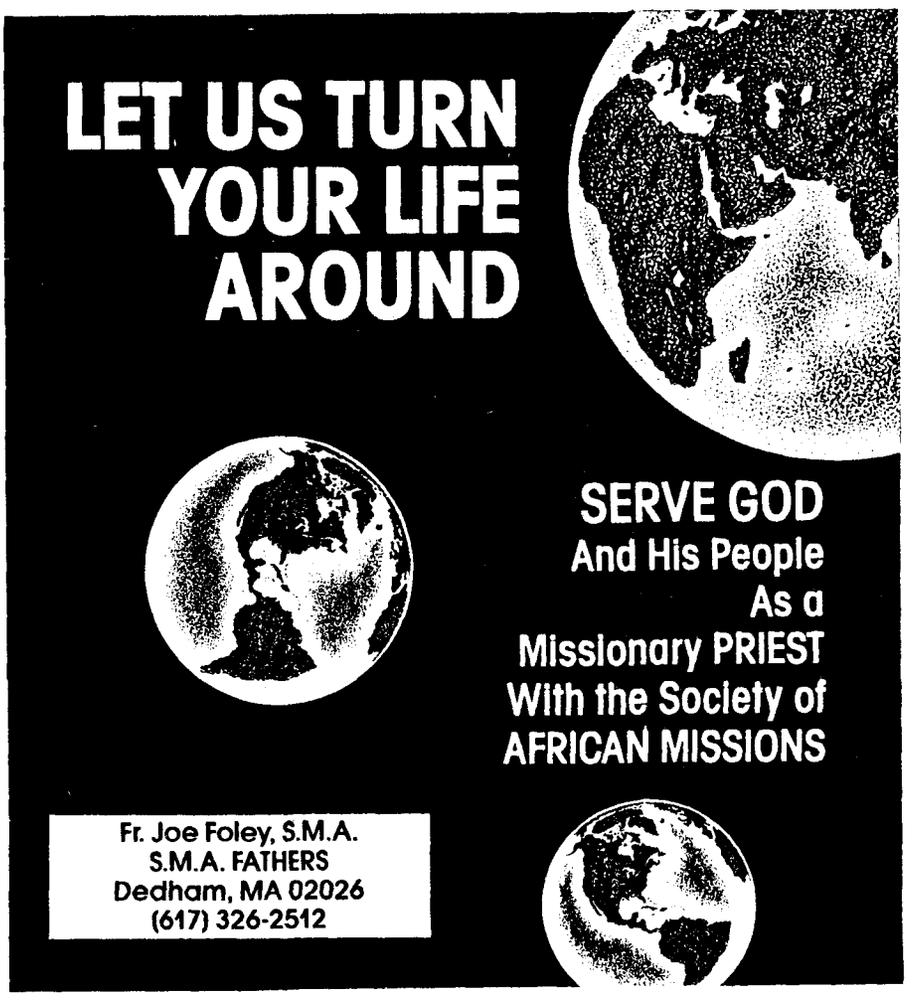
To the Editors: While I agree with the position taken by Judith Banki and Alan L. Mittleman that the Holocaust deserves much more attention than the brief reference made by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in its recently released "Notes," I take strong exception to the implicit assumption of the authors and the Vatican Commission that the Holocaust was an exclusively Jewish experience.

As Elie Wiesel has stated so often, while the Jews were the first to be murdered by the Nazis, they were not the only victims. Simon Wiesenthal has said that the Nazi atrocities were directed against many more than the Jewish people. Extensive evidence supports the estimate that nearly ten million other innocent victims were killed with the six million Jews. The Presidential Commission on the Holocaust, in its report to President Jimmy Carter, noted that, "There is evidence indicating that the Nazis intended ultimately to wipe out the Slavs and other peoples."

Nazism was as fundamentally opposed to Christians as it was to Jews. Joseph Goebbels noted in his diaries that Hitler was "completely anti-Christian. He views Christianity as a symptom of decay. . . It is a branch of the Jewish race."

Millions of Christians died as a result of the genocide generated by the Gestapo. The Holocaust cannot be studied historically, logically, or morally as an event unrelated to the Nazi atrocities throughout Eastern Europe.

STANISLAUS J. MARKIEWICZ



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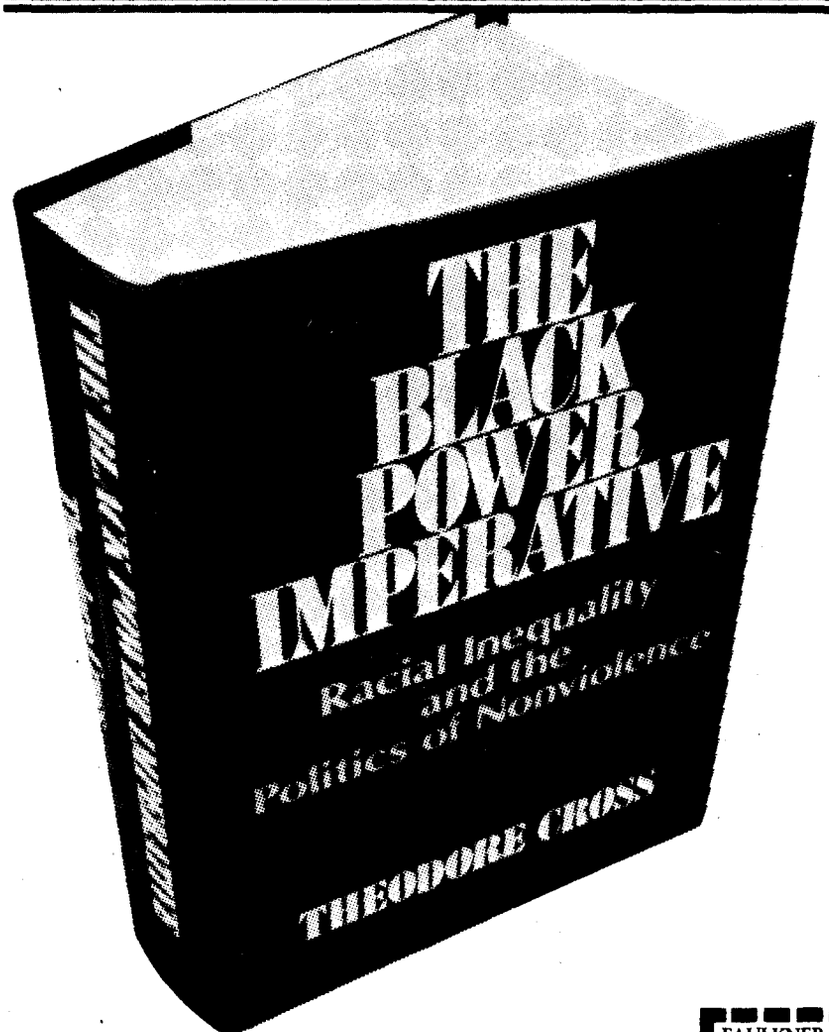

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